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B.R. 1736 (34) (48)

BATTLE SUMMARY No. 12

THE ATTACK ON ST. NAZAIRE

28th March, 1942

1948

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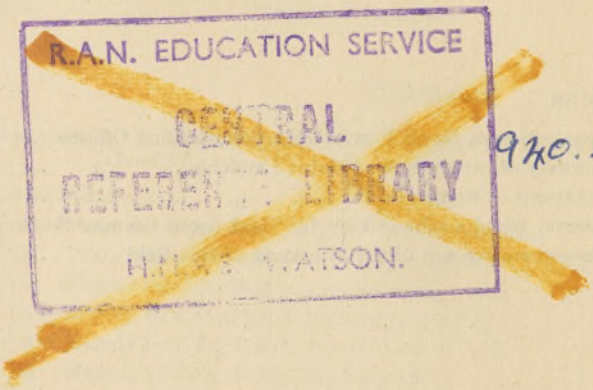

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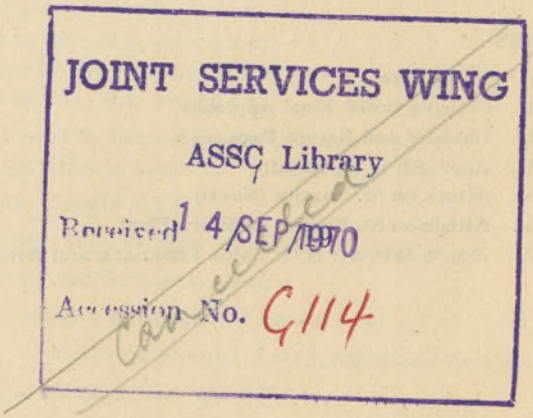

T.S.D. 35/48

TACTICAL AND STAFF DUTIES DIVISION (HISTORICAL SECTION),
NAVAL STAFF, ADMIRALTY, S.W.1.

CONTENTS

Section		Page
	Foreword	iv
1.	Introduction	1
2.	Object of Operation and Forces	1
3.	Preparation and Plan	2
4.	Outward Passage, 26th/27th March	4
5.	The Approach	5
6.	The Attack	6
7.	The Commando Operations	10
8.	The Withdrawal	16
9.	Destroyer Action, Dawn, 28th March	18
10.	Return Passage, 28th/29th March	19
11.	Results and Lessons	22

APPENDICES

A.	Organisation of Naval Forces, with Commanding Officers	24
B.	Summary of experiences of Motor Launches	25
C.	Armament of British Forces	27
D.	Material Results achieved by the Raid (from German Sources)	27
E.	Eye-witness account of the aftermath of this Raid	28

INDEX 30

PLANS

1.	St. Nazaire	Facing page 32
2.	Cruising Order, Final Approach	
3.	Outward and Return Passages	
4.	Approach to St. Nazaire	
5.	Attack on St. Nazaire (Naval)	
6.	Attack on St. Nazaire (Military Plan)	
7.	Action between H.M. Ships Tynedale and Atherstone and five T.Bs.	

ABBREVIATIONS

A.A.	Anti-aircraft
A/S	Anti-submarine.
C.O.	Commanding Officer.
D/F	Direction finding.
M.G.B.	Motor gunboat.
M.L.	Motor launch.
M.T.B.	Motor torpedo boat.
O.C.	Officer Commanding.
R.D/F.	Radio direction finding.
S.N.O.	Senior Naval Officer.
T.B.	Torpedo boat.
W/T	Wireless telegraphy.

SOURCES

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Enclosures :—

1. Remarks of the Commander-in-Chief, Plymouth.
2. Report by Commander R. E. D. Ryder, R.N., 1.4.42.
3. Report by C.O., H.M.S. ATHERSTONE, 1.4.42.
4. Report by C.O., H.M.S. TYNEDALE, 31.3.42.
5. Report by C.O., H.M.S. CLEVELAND, 31.3.42.
6. Report by C.O., H.M.S. BROCKLESBY.
7. N.O.I.C. Dartmouth, No. 652/Sec. of 31.3.42, enclosing Reports by C.Os., M.Ls., 160 and 270.
8. N.O.I.C., Dartmouth, No. 672 of 3.4.42, enclosing Report by C.O., M.L. 156.
9. Report by C.O., M.L. 341, 6.4.42.
10. Report by C.O., M.L. 447, 30.3.42.
11. Narrative by No. 19 Group, R.A.F.
12. Report by C.O., M.L. 446, 10.4.42.

M.06027/45. Report by Lieut.-Com. S. H. Beattie, V.C., R.N.
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H. and A. 190/45. Loss of M.T.B.74.

Combined operations H.Q. Records : Operation "Chariot."

Translations of captured German documents.

N.I.D.02699/Z ; Blowing up of H.M.S. CAMPBELTOWN.

N.I.D.06799/42. Eye-witness Account of the Aftermath of the Raid.

Weekly Intelligence Reports, Nos. 115, 117.

Bay of Biscay Pilot (with supplement).

Historical Section War Diary, 29th/30th March, 1942.

Navy List, February and April, 1942.

The Attack on St. Nazaire, by Commander R. E. D. Ryder, V.C., R.N. (John Murray, 1947).

FOREWORD

The following Battle Summary was originally completed in July 1942. At that time, though the main facts of the operation were fairly well established, many of the details were in doubt, owing to the heavy casualties sustained by the motor launches and the capture by the enemy of almost all the commandos who got on shore.

Since the surrender of Germany in 1945, a considerable amount of additional information has been obtained from returned prisoners of war and the examination of captured German documents dealing with the raid. This information has been embodied in the following version.

A fuller account of this unique exploit may be read in the book by Commander Ryder, V.C., published by Messrs. John Murray in 1947.

This edition cancels the previous edition of *Battle Summary No. 12. B.R.1736* (7), *1943*, all copies of which should be destroyed.

THE ATTACK ON ST. NAZAIRE,

28th March, 1942

1. Introduction

St. Nazaire is situated on the north bank of the River Loire, about 120 miles south-east of Brest. Ideally placed for operations against commerce in the Atlantic, the port had been developed by the Germans as a submarine base and could also boast of the only dry dock on the west coast of France capable of accommodating German capital ships.

The enemy had not neglected the defences of this important base, and the raid on the 28th March, 1942, was in fact a frontal attack on a heavily defended port by a force of small unarmoured vessels. In surprise, therefore, lay the principal promise of success much as it did at Zeebrugge in 1918. But there the task was not so difficult. Four hundred miles was the distance to St. Nazaire compared with eighty to Zeebrugge, and the passage had to be accomplished by a large number of weakly armed vessels, without detection by aircraft or R.D/F. Zeebrugge, too, had an entrance open to the sea, while St. Nazaire lies 5 miles up a river. Finally, the great development during the last 25 years of close range quick-firing weapons constituted a formidable threat to the wooden petrol-driven craft assigned to the operations.[1] These handicaps had to be faced in drawing up the naval and military plan of attack.

2. Object of Operation and Forces

The port of St. Nazaire consists of an *avant port*, and two basins entered by locks. (See *Plan No.* 1).

The St. Nazaire basin, on the western side of which are the submarine shelters, is situated north of the avant port and is about 650 yards long. The main entrance is from the avant port by the south lock, which is crossed by two swing bridges but small craft can enter from the river by the east lock in the Old Entrance.

Connected with the St. Nazaire Basin on the north is the Penhouet Basin, at the north-eastern corner of which are three graving docks. Since 1932 the south-east corner of this basin has had direct access to the River by a large lock, which could itself be used as a dock, known as the "Normandie" Dock after the 83,400 ton liner for whose accommodation it had been specially constructed. At each end of this dock was a massive caisson, operated by hydraulic machinery.[2]

The immobilisation of the Normandie dock—the only one large enough to take the *Tirpitz*—was the principal object of the raid, subsidiary objects being to open the St. Nazaire basin to the tide and to do as much damage as possible to the dock entrances, lock machinery, etc.

The scheme was briefly as follows. The destroyer CAMPBELTOWN was to ram the lock gate at the southern end of the Normandie dock and be scuttled there, having on board 3 tons of high explosive timed to blow up some 2½ hours later.

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[1] Admiral of the Fleet Sir Charles Forbes, C. in C., Plymouth, in his remarks on the operations states definitely that he regards the attack on St. Nazaire as more difficult than that on Zeebrugge.

[2] The Normandie dock, also known as the "Forme Ecluse," is the largest dock in the world ; 1148 feet long and 164 feet wide it could accommodate a ship of over 85,000 tons. Its caissons measured 167 feet long, 54 feet high and 35 feet thick.

Commando troops were to land on the lock gates from the CAMPBELTOWN, and from motor launches at the Old Mole and the Old Entrance, to carry out demolitions in the dockyard, and to hold the area east of the St. Nazaire basin and locks—which consisted of two small islands, known as I. de Penhouet to the north of the Old Entrance and I. de St. Nazaire to the south—until re-embarkation in the motor launches was ordered. It was hoped to get well in undetected and then to "bluff" the enemy for just sufficient time for the CAMPBELTOWN to reach the lock gate, but it was realised that to get out again would be another matter ; for this purpose cover by smoke had to be relied on.

The naval side of the operations was entrusted to Commander R. E. D. Ryder, R.N., and the forces employed consisted of M.G.B.314, as headquarter boat, carrying the S.N.O. and Lieut.-Colonel A. C. Newman, the Military Commander, 16 M.Ls. organised in two flotillas, the destroyer CAMPBELTOWN and M.T.B.74.[1] Embarked in the motor launches and CAMPBELTOWN were the Commando troops.

The destroyers ATHERSTONE and TYNEDALE accompanied the force as escorts, but did not enter the River Loire.

3. Preparations and Plan

The force detailed for the operation, which was known as "Chariot," assembled at Falmouth, where training was carried out between the 12th and 25th March.[2] In order to ensure secrecy, all vessels taking part were referred to collectively as the 10th A/S Striking Force, and all training programmes were worded accordingly. The essence of the various security measures adopted, such as the issue of tropical clothing to the M.Ls. crews, was to discourage any implication of "super" secrecy. When troops were embarked for training, it was announced that this was in connection with exercise "Vivid" to test the defences of Plymouth—an exercise actually carried out—somewhat to the annoyance of the "10th A/S Striking Force," with whose "programme" it interfered. After returning to Falmouth on its conclusion on 23rd March, the force was kept at short notice ; contact with the shore virtually ceased, and the details of the operation were explained to the officers and key ratings, though the name of the actual locality was withheld.

It had been agreed by the naval and military Force Commanders that the CAMPBELTOWN, being the main unit, should receive prime consideration in every respect. Light craft were to lead her in and give her full supporting fire.[3]

Detailed operation orders dealing with the organisation and assembly of forces, the passage, final approach, attack, and withdrawal were issued by Commander Ryder to the Naval Forces. The organisation, together with the names of the Commanding Officers, will be found in *Appendix A* ; for the

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[1] See *Appendix A*.

[2] H.M.S. CAMPBELTOWN was fitted out at Devonport for her task of destroying the lock gate, and the Commander-in-Chief, Plymouth, remarks that the work done was admirably quick and efficient. The arrangements for detonating the explosives were devised by Lieutenant N. T. B. Tibbits, R.N., of H.M.S. VERNON. Lieut. Tibbits accompanied the expedition in the CAMPBELTOWN, and was among those who lost their lives. He was awarded the D.S.C. for his services. The endurance of M.G.B.314 was not great enough for her to accomplish the return journey under her own power, but Commander Ryder found it possible to increase it sufficiently by fitting additional fuel tanks.

[3] The possible alternative of the CAMPBELTOWN, being a steel ship, bearing the brunt of the fire while the light craft came in under her shelter was discussed, but rejected. The plan finally adopted envisaged sacrificing everything, if necessary, in order to get the CAMPBELTOWN in.

sake of clarity, the motor launches will be designated by their flotilla numbers (see *Plan 2*) as well as their List of Navy numbers throughout this narrative.

For the final approach[1] and attack the special cruising order shown in Plan 2 was laid down.

Commander Ryder, in M.G.B.314, with an M.L. from the 1st Flotilla on either quarter (Nos. 7 and 8), led the force. These two motor launches had no troops on board, but carried torpedoes, and formed a striking force under his immediate orders, to deal with any surface craft that might offer resistance. It was stressed that the policy was to pass through unseen or by "bluff," but any vessel showing definite opposition was to be sunk at once by torpedoes. About 2½ cables astern of M.G.B.314 followed the CAMPBELTOWN, acting as guide, with the 2nd Flotilla of M.Ls. carrying the Commando troops destined for the Old Mole on her port quarter, and the remainder of the 1st Flotilla with the troops for the Old Entrance on her starboard quarter. The two last boats in the port column carried no troops ; their primary duty was to land the troops from any ships which might be disabled, and they were also to deal with enemy craft interfering with the rear. M.T.B.74 was in the rear of the starboard column ; she was to act as the S.N.O. might direct, as the assault developed.

The CAMPBELTOWN was given liberty to increase speed should the force be fired on, in order to reach her objective as quickly as possible ; and emphasis was laid on the importance of careful fire control by all British ships, to avoid endangering friendly craft.

As soon as their tasks on shore were completed, the crew of the CAMPBELTOWN and the troops were to re-embark, the M.Ls. leaving independently as they filled, in order to avoid congestion. Smoke was to be used freely to cover the withdrawal. All were to rendezvous with the destroyers at 0600/28 in position Y, some 25 miles south-west of St. Nazaire. It was emphasised that the best defence against the air attacks which were expected was for all ships to remain concentrated, and that "we must all stand by our lame ducks regardless of the speed or condition of our own craft."

The night of the 27th/28th March was provisionally selected for the attempt.[2] On the 24th, the destroyers TYNEDALE and ATHERSTONE arrived at Falmouth, and Commander Ryder and his staff embarked in the latter. During the nights of the 24th and 25th, all military stores and equipment were transferred from the Special Service Ship PRINCESS JOSEPHINE CHARLOTTE, in which the troops were accommodated, to the CAMPBELTOWN and motor launches ; the troops followed on receipt of the order "Preparative Chariot" from the C. in C., Plymouth, at 0930/26, care being taken to keep them out of sight after embarkation.

At 1230/26 came the executive order "Carry out Chariot" and Colonel Newman, with the remainder of the Headquarters Staff, embarked in the ATHERSTONE.

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[1] The entrance of the River Loire is about 6½ miles wide, narrowing to a mile at St. Nazaire. The deep water channel—300 yards wide—follows the north-western shore at a distance of 2 or 3 cables, the remainder of the estuary being occupied by shoals. It was over these shoals, shortly before high water, that the approach was to be made. (See *Plan* 4)

[2] At St. Nazaire :—
Sunset, 27/3, 1931 ; end of nautical twilight, 2040.
Sunrise, 28/3, 0701 ; beginning of nautical twilight, 0553.
Moon rise, 27/3, 1405 / Moonset, 28/3, 0452 } 1st quarter, 25/3.
Low water, 27/3, 1944 ; high water, 28/3, 0123 ; height 13½ ft.
All times are B.S.T. (Zone – 1).

4. Outward passage, 26th/27th March. (*Plan* 3)

At 1400, 26th March, the 10th A/S Striking Force sailed from Falmouth. During daylight the motor launches were spread 2 cables apart ahead of the three destroyers, thereby simulating a routine A/S sweep, in case of observation by enemy aircraft. M.G.B.314 was towed by the ATHERSTONE and M.T.B.74 by the CAMPBELTOWN.

Commander Ryder, in the ATHERSTONE, gave the Lizard a wide berth, and shaped course at 13 knots to follow a route carefully chosen so as to keep the force out of the track of enemy reconnaissance flights.[1]

The weather was favourable during the afternoon of the 26th, the wind E.N.E., force 4, with considerable haze. At about 0230, 27th, the haze cleared, and when dawn broke visibility was extreme.

At 0700, 27th, the force was in position C (about 160 miles to the westward of St. Nazaire), and course was altered to 112°. As there was time in hand, speed was reduced to 8 knots, in order to minimise the chances of being spotted from the air.

Twenty minutes later, in lat. 46° 34′ N., long. 5° 41′ W., the TYNEDALE reported an object[2] bearing 002°, which proved to be a submarine. The TYNEDALE closed at high speed; when some 5 miles distant the submarine fired a recognition signal, which was replied to with five long flashes. This appeared to satisfy her, and she continued on the surface until at 0745 the TYNEDALE broke the white[3] ensign and opened fire at a range of about 5,000 yards.[4] The submarine crash dived, but a depth charge attack carried out at 0758 forced her to break surface when she was engaged by every gun which would bear, and was seen to be hit ; she disappeared with a heavy list to port after a few seconds.

The ATHERSTONE then joined in, and the submarine was hunted by the two destroyers until 0920 when they shaped course to the south-westward and rejoined the remainder of the force by an indirect route.

It seemed probable that the submarine had been sunk, but, if not, it was possible that she might later surface and make an enemy report. Commander Ryder considered, however, that as she had not sighted the motor launches, she would merely report two destroyers steering south-west.

Actually, the submarine (U.593, which chanced to be returning from a patrol) had sighted some of the motor launches before she was attacked. Nor had she been sunk. After the attack, she remained submerged till 1347, when she surfaced in position lat. 46° 50′ N., long. 5° W. and made the following report : "0620[5]: 3 destroyers, 10 M.T.Bs. 46° 52′ N. 5° 48′ W. course West." This report was picked up by the German Group Command, West, at 1420. Fortunately, the westerly course mentioned in the signal led the Germans to appreciate that either the British force was withdrawing after a minelaying operation, or that the M.T.Bs. were being transferred to Gibraltar. The possibility of an attack from the sea on a port on the French coast was not considered.

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[1] This route passed through the lettered positions shown in Plan 3.

[2] First sighted by the 2nd officer of the watch, Mr. S. W. J. Ford, Gunner, R.N., bearing 037°, 7½ miles distant.

[3] During the passage all white ensigns were hauled down and the destroyers wore the colours of the Third Reich.

[4] One hit is believed to have been obtained.

[5] G.M.T., *i.e.*, 0720 B.S.T.

After this episode the sky became covered with low cloud, which greatly reduced the chances of detection from the air. Shortly before noon a couple of trawlers were met, which were sunk by the TYNEDALE and ATHERSTONE, the crews first being taken off. They were French, and appeared well disposed. From what they said it seemed clear that none of the fishing craft carried wireless, and consequently the large number of trawlers sighted in the course of the afternoon were not interfered with.

At 1240/27, a signal was received from the C. in C. Plymouth, stating that five German torpedo boats previously reported at St. Nazaire had been located at Nantes on 25/3, but at 1718/27, a further signal reported that they had reappeared in the neighbourhood of St. Nazaire. These torpedo boats constituted a superior force, but as the U-boat had apparently sent no report, and as the British force had not been sighted from the air,[1] it appeared probable that its presence was unknown to the enemy, and there seemed to be no reason for any change of plan. In point of fact, as previously mentioned, the German Group Command had then been in possession of U.593's report for some three hours, but paradoxically this worked out to the advantage of the British, since the enemy, adopting the supposition that the British Force was returning home after minelaying, ordered the torpedo boats to carry out a sweep in the sea area off St. Nazaire during the night. They were consequently already at sea by the time Commander Ryder's Force entered the Loire and well out of the way during the critical period of the raid.

Half an hour after sunset, Commander Ryder and Colonel Newman transferred from the ATHERSTONE to M.G.B.314, and the special cruising order designed for the attack was taken up.[2] (see ante, section 3). Course was set to the north-eastward for position Z—some 40 miles from St. Nazaire—where it had been arranged that the submarine STURGEON (Lieutenant P. H. B. Brunner, R.N.) should show a light as a beacon. To assist in picking her up, the TYNEDALE and ATHERSTONE were spread on either beam during this stage of the approach.

5. The Approach. (*Plans* 3 *and* 4)

The STURGEON's light was sighted right ahead at 2200 and the flotilla passed within hailing distance at 2215/27, the ATHERSTONE and TYNEDALE parting company to patrol to the north-westward.

After the STURGEON had been passed, mist came down and visibility decreased to about 2 miles.

From about midnight, gun flashes were seen to the north-eastward, and half an hour later the wide arc over which they extended, together with considerable flak, indicated some sort of air activity.[3]

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[1] Group Command West subsequently explained that owing to the late reception of the U-boat's message and the lack of air-reconnaissance forces, the opportunity for an attack on the British force was missed.

[2] M.L. No. 10 (341) had developed a defect in her port engine at 1830/27, which reduced her speed to 10.8 knots. Strenuous efforts failed to remedy this, and her troops were transferred to one of the spare M.Ls.—No. 15, M.L.10's engine was not repaired till 2222/27. It being then too late for her to take part in the assault, she returned independently to Falmouth.

[3] The Commander-in-Chief, Plymouth, had arranged with Bomber Command for an air attack to be carried out.

No land was sighted until 0045/28, when the northern shore could be dimly discerned from the vicinity of Le Chatelier Shoal (7½ miles from St. Nazaire). The CAMPBELTOWN, as guide, was given a course to steer, thereby leaving M.G.B.314 free to manoeuvre as required to take soundings or obtain R.D/F ranges from the shore.[1]

At 0125 Les Morees Tower was passed. So far all had gone well; no searchlights had been switched on and the flotilla had obviously not been detected;[2] it was only a mile and three-quarters to the lock gate. Just then, however, one searchlight from No. 3 heavy coastal battery was switched on down the Charpentier Channel, followed by all the searchlights on both banks of the river, and from that moment the entire force was flood lit. Commander Ryder at once made a bogus identity signal to the shore signal station at No. 3 battery, and signalled in German that they were "proceeding up harbour in accordance with instructions." On receipt of this signal some of the searchlights were switched off, but he was then called up from the South Entrance, to which he replied with a similar message. While this was in progress the force was fired on by light flak from one position, so the signal for "a vessel considering herself to be fired on by friendly forces" was made, and the firing ceased.

Four priceless minutes—one mile—had been gained by stratagem, but a few seconds later the force must have been recognised as hostile, for, suddenly, a heavy fire was opened on it, and the action became general. To quote Commander Ryder, "It is difficult to describe the full fury of the attack that was let loose on both sides, the air became one mass of red and green tracer, most of it going over." From the head of the line it did not appear that any of the shore surface batteries opened fire, though it is possible that they fired on the rear.

As the action started a flak ship was seen right ahead, which opened fire with some small automatic weapon; she was speedily silenced by M.G.B.314's pom-pom, but had to be passed unpleasantly close.

6. The Attack. (*Plan 5*)

The Old Mole was passed by M.G.B.314 at a distance of 1½ cables and she then sheered off to starboard to clear the course for the blockship.

With but 500 yards to go, Lieut.-Commander Beattie[3] drove the CAMPBELTOWN at his objective. Though repeatedly hit throughout her length by shells and bullets of about 4in. calibre and downwards, no essential parts

[1] Commander Ryder remarks that the use of R.D/F in the M.G.B. as a navigational aid was invaluable in working their way up the estuary. A considerable set to the northward was experienced during the approach. The CAMPBELTOWN grounded lightly twice—at about 0045 and 0055. This possibility had been foreseen, as no accurate charts were available, but she could not be lightened further.

[2] In actual fact the force had been sighted ten minutes previously (at 0115) when a little over 4 miles from the lock gate by the lookout post on the headland of St. Marc. It was not, however, recognised as being hostile.

[3] H.M. The King approved the award of the Victoria Cross to Lieut.-Commander S. H. Beattie for his "great gallantry and determination" on this occasion in command of H.M.S. CAMPBELTOWN. The citation goes on to say "Under intense fire directed at the bridge from point-blank range of about 100 yards, and in the face of the blinding glare of many searchlights, he steamed her into the lock gates, and beached and scuttled her in the correct position.

This Victoria Cross is awarded to Lieut.-Commander Beattie in recognition not only of his own valour but also of that of the unnamed officers and men of a very gallant ship's company, many of whom have not returned."—*London Gazette.*

of the ship were damaged. The Coxswain was wounded, as was the rating who relieved him ; Lieutenant Tibbits then took the wheel, and at 0134—only 4 minutes after the scheduled time—she struck deep into the lock gate, her forecastle ablaze and her Oerlikons firing fiercely.[1] Some relief was afforded to her by M.L.160 (No. 8)—the torpedo carrying M.L. at the head of the starboard column—which opened an accurate fire with her 3-pdr. on the light A.A. positions to starboard of the CAMPBELTOWN and silenced them.

With the CAMPBELTOWN firmly wedged in the lock and her scuttling charges momentarily expected to go off, the main objective of the expedition had been attained. Every precaution that ingenuity and experiment could suggest had been taken to ensure the detonation of the explosive charges she carried in due course, and unless some unforeseeable circumstance intervened, the doom of the lock gate seemed inevitable. No more could be done, and the interest accordingly shifted to the subsidiary objects. In these, too, a remarkable measure of success was quickly achieved especially in view of the fact that only about 40% of the troops got ashore, owing to the severe opposition encountered by the motor launches.

Turning then to the motor launches,[2] it will be convenient to consider the attempts at the Old Entrance and the Old Mole separately, though it must be borne in mind that both were actually taking place simultaneously. It will be remembered that the starboard column was carrying the commandos destined for the Old Entrance (see *plan* 2). Covering fire for these attempts was provided by M.L.270 (No. 7) for the first five minutes after the CAMPBELTOWN struck, but she was then badly damaged by shellfire, and obliged to withdraw. Most unfortunately, the leading troop carrying M.L. of this column—M.L.192 (No. 1), in which were embarked the Senior Naval Officer, M.Ls., and the Commando assault unit—was the first to be hit ; she burst into flames and, shooting across the bows of the port column, beached herself south of the Old Mole, ablaze from end to end. The next two in the line—M.Ls.262 (No. 2) and 267 (No. 3)—were dazzled by the glare and missed the landing place. They ran on some way up river before ascertaining their position ; then, returning, succeeded in landing their troops in the Old Entrance later on, but these were repulsed and had to be re-embarked. Both motor launches were destroyed by gunfire shortly afterwards. No. 4 (M.L.268) turned in towards the landing place correctly, but was hit while approaching and enveloped in flames ; No. 5 (M.L.156) had been hit early in the action, and with steering gear broken down and most of her personnel casualties, was forced to withdraw on one engine. The last boat in the line, No. 6 (M.L.177), alone reached the Old Entrance and landed her troops on the south side as planned. In the glare and confusion prevailing at the time, these events were of course unknown to Commander Ryder, who subsequently reported that at this stage it appeared to him that the situation was being got under control ; firing had decreased and was mostly confined to positions on the housetops.[3]

While all this was going on at the Old Entrance, the Port Column was meeting equally fierce resistance at the Old Mole. There the landing place was

[1] The ship ran about 35 feet into the lock, which was 34 feet wide, the stem buckling and the forcastle deck running over the top and projecting a foot or so over the other side. This brought the explosive charge, the foremost end of which was 36 feet from the stem, into an excellent position.

[2] A summary of the narratives of the individual M.Ls. will be found in *Appendix B*.

[3] This apparent slackening of the firing may have been due to commandos which had disembarked from the CAMPBELTOWN silencing the positions in her immediate vicinity.

protected by two massive pill boxes, and the defenders had no such distraction as the sudden arrival of the CAMPBELTOWN with her commandos in their midst to occupy their attention. The leading boat, M.L.447 (No. 9), grounded while still 10 feet off the jetty; she encountered a withering fire and was set ablaze almost at once. Backing out, she sank, the troops and crew being rescued most gallantly by M.L.160 (No. 8—one of the van torpedo carrying craft), which subsequently made good her escape at 0220. The next boat in the line, M.L.457 (No. 11),[1] succeeded in landing her troops—the only craft in the column to do so—but was hit later, and after drifting off the Old Mole for some time, again came under fire and blew up. No. 12 (M.L.307) ran aground close in to the Mole, and could not get alongside; after suffering many casualties and inflicting some, she backed out and engaged batteries and searchlights on the eastern bank of the river till 0230, when she withdrew, shooting up a merchant ship on the way out. M.Ls. 443 (No. 13) and 446 (No. 15) missed the Old Mole in the glare of the searchlights; returning later, each found it impossible to get alongside and withdrew, the latter suffering heavy casualties. M.L.306 (No. 14), too, failed to get alongside, as by the time she arrived off the mole she found both sides obstructed by burning motor launches;[2] after several attempts, under heavy gunfire, she was forced to withdraw. The last craft in the port column—M.L.298 (No. 16), which carried no troops—passed close to the Old Mole and, after engaging batteries north of the Normandie Dock and later the Old Mole defences, she caught fire passing through some burning petrol and was subsequently blown up by enemy gunfire on her way out.

Meanwhile, Commander Ryder, having seen the CAMPBELTOWN strike the lock, had taken M.G.B.314 to the south side of the Old Entrance and landed Colonel Newman, who hastened off with his Staff to join his men. M.L.177 (No. 6) had then just landed her troops and as she cast off, Commander Ryder ordered her to go alongside the CAMPBELTOWN'S stern. This she did, and was seen to shove off with a considerable number of the destroyer's crew on board, but she failed to appear at the rendezvous next morning and it was long before her fate was known.[3] M.G.B.314 then turned round and secured by the north side of the entrance, where she received on board between 20 and 30 of the CAMPBELTOWN'S crew, while M.T.B.74 reported for instructions. Commander Ryder had it in mind that she might be required to torpedo the CAMPBELTOWN, in event of the scuttling charges failing. He therefore landed and examined the CAMPBELTOWN—by then apparently deserted—from the dockside. After seeing four of the scuttling charges go off he decided that all was well, and ordered M.T.B.74 to torpedo the lock gate in the Old Entrance and then withdraw at high speed independently.

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[1] M.L. 457 had closed up on the leader when M.L.341 (originally No. 10) developed her defect at 1830/27.

[2] M.L.447 (No. 9) to the north and M.L.192 (No. 1) to the south. This led to the opinion immediately after the operation that some of the M.Ls. had mistakenly gone to the south side of the Old Mole instead of the north side, as ordered. Under this impression the C. in C. Plymouth remarked "this unfortunate misunderstanding certainly reduced the number of troops who got ashore according to plan and therefore hindered the complete overcoming of local resistance which had been hoped for . . ." It is now (1947) known that no such mistake occurred, and that any M.Ls. seen to the southward of the Mole got there due to circumstances beyond their control.

[3] M.L.177 was hit about 10 minutes after she started down river, set on fire, and burned for four hours. The survivors, among whom was Lieut.-Com. Beattie, were eventually rescued by a German trawler.

During this time, Commander Ryder stated, they could hear the military demolition parties "doing good work and with surprising rapidity." Nearby, the building which housed the lockworking machinery was blown up, wounding two men on board M.G.B.314. This was followed by the pumping house, and another shed was set on fire, the flames casting a lurid glow which silhouetted the craft in the river to the batteries on the opposite bank.[1]

Commander Ryder, having seen M.T.B.74 hit the Old Entrance lock gate with her two torpedoes[2] and start off down river,[3] took M.G.B.314 round to see how the assault on the Old Mole was progressing. It was at once apparent that matters had fared badly there. The approaches were flood-lit by searchlights and a deadly fire was being poured on the motor launches still bravely attempting to get alongside. M.G.B.314 at once gave what support she could, but she herself was frequently hit and soon only the pom-pom remained in action. The pom-pom gunlayer, Able Seaman W. A. Savage, whose skill and gallantry was outstanding throughout the operation until he was eventually killed at his post, engaged various A.A. positions[4] and twice silenced the pillbox on the mole, but on each occasion it re-commenced firing after an interval.[5] At one time the fire slackened and Commander Ryder was of the opinion that if a force reserve could have been rushed in at that moment, these positions so vital for the retirement might well have been carried. There was, however, no such reserve, and it had to be recognised that at both landing places the enemy was getting the upper hand.

The story of the end of the assault is best told in the words of Commander Ryder's report. "All this time," he wrote, "we were lying stopped about 100 yards off the Old Mole, and although fired on fairly continually by flak positions and hit many times we were, by the grace of God, not set ablaze. On looking round the harbour, however, we could count about seven or eight blazing M.Ls., and were forced to realize that we were the only craft left in sight. In consequence of this a more concentrated fire was directed upon us, so we dropped a naval smoke float while I called a council of war. No withdrawal signal[6] had been sent, and no contact made with the shore by wireless. There was still at least another half hour before one could expect the landing party to reach

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[1] This was all that was known for many months about the work of the troops on shore, since none who landed was able to re-embark. Some account of how they fared, based on reports received after the conclusion of the war, will be found in Section 7 (postea).

[2] M.T.B.74's two torpedoes each contained 1,800 lb. of explosive, and was fitted with an improvised delay action device, set to explode 2½ hours later. Actually they did not go off till some 36 hours had elapsed.

[3] This was the last seen of M.T.B.74, whose fate was unknown for some time. It has since been established that she was set on fire and burnt while attempting to assist one of the burning M.Ls. on her way out. Her C.O., Lieut. Wynne, was gallantly rescued by Chief Motor Mechanic Lovegrove, to whom the C.G.M. was subsequently awarded.

[4] It was found extremely difficult to knock out the positions sited on the housetops.

[5] The posthumous award of the Victoria Cross to Able Seaman W. A. Savage was approved by H.M. The King for his "great gallantry, skill and devotion to duty as gunlayer of the pom-pom in a motor gunboat. Completely exposed and under heavy fire, he engaged positions ashore with cool and steady accuracy . . .

This Victoria Cross is awarded in recognition not only of the gallantry and devotion to duty of Able Seaman Savage, but also of the valour shown by many others, unnamed, in motor launches, motor gunboats and motor torpedo boats, who gallantly carried out their duty in entirely exposed positions against enemy fire at very close range."—*London Gazette*.

[6] The withdrawal signals were to have been given by special 35 star red and green rockets. These rockets, however, together with part of Colonel Newman's H.Q. Staff, had been sunk in M.L.267. Actually at this time the withdrawal on shore was in progress, but Commander Ryder had no means of knowing this.

the point of evacuation. We would have returned to the Old Entrance, but we could see a heavy cross fire across this inlet, and it appeared that enemy forces on both banks were shooting at each other. It was clearly impossible for us to return. With some thirty to forty men on board and our decks piled with seriously wounded, I decided at 0250 that we were in no position to take off the soldiers we had landed. It was unlikely that we would survive another five minutes with the fire that was then being concentrated in our direction, and so we left at high speed."[1]

Almost at the same moment that Commander Ryder was making his difficult decision to withdraw, Colonel Newman, having reached a similar conclusion as to the impossibility of evacuation by water, was organising his troops for an attempt to escape inland. Some account of their activities on shore and their desperate bid for freedom will be found in the following section.

7. The Commando Operations

Before following the fortunes of the Commandos on shore, it is necessary to consider briefly the main features of the military plan.

The essence of this plan was the rapid seizure of the islands of St. Nazaire and Penhouet. These two islands were then to be isolated by the destruction of the bridges and locks connecting them to the mainland,[2] and held long enough for the demolition parties to do their work, which was specified in great detail, after which the withdrawal was to be carried out.

The Old Mole was chosen as the point of re-embarkation, the troops from Penhouet Island passing over by the bridge across the Old Entrance, which was then—together with the two small lock gates—to be blown up. While this was being done, a final bridgehead was to be formed round the base of the Old Mole, through which it was hoped an orderly withdrawal to the motor launches could be effected.

In order to give effect to this plan, Colonel Newman organised his force in three main groups. Each group contained two assault parties, which were to clear the area in the first instance, and a number of demolition parties to follow up. The latter each included a small protection party of fighting troops to prevent interference from snipers or enemy who might infiltrate into the occupied areas.

GROUP I, landing at the Old Mole, was responsible for St. Nazaire Island to the southward of the northern lock of the South Entrance.

GROUP II, landing at the Old Entrance, was responsible for the north and west of Penhouet Island. At the last moment, a special party was added

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[1] H.M. The King approved the award of the Victoria Cross to Commander R. E. D. Ryder "for great gallantry in the attack on St. Nazaire. He commanded a force of small unprotected ships in an attack on a heavily defended port and led H.M.S. CAMPBELTOWN under intense fire from short range weapons at point-blank range. Though the main object of the expedition had been accomplished in the beaching of the CAMPBELTOWN, he remained on the spot conducting operations, evacuating men from the CAMPBELTOWN, and dealing with strong points and close range weapons while exposed to heavy fire for one hour and 16 minutes, and did not withdraw till it was certain that his ship could be of no use in rescuing any of the Commando troops who were still ashore. That his motor gun-boat, now full of dead and wounded, should have survived and should have been able to withdraw through an intense barrage of close-range fire was almost a miracle."—*London Gazette*.

[2] There were 4 dock gates and 2 swing bridges across the South entrance and 1 lifting bridge at the north end of St. Nazaire Basin to be dealt with. In addition were the lock gates of the Normandie dock, but these were not to be destroyed till later.

to this group to strike south into St. Nazaire Island, and deal with two gun positions which air photographs revealed on the water front between the two landing places.

GROUP III, under Major Copeland—Colonel Newman's Second-in-Command—was to land from H.M.S. CAMPBELTOWN on to the caisson and deal with the adjacent areas on each side of the Normandie Dock. These areas contained the most important demolition objectives—the dock pumping machinery and hydraulic lock machinery to the west and the oil fuel storage tanks to the east.

Colonel Newman himself intended to set up his Headquarters on St. Nazaire Island, close south of the Old Entrance lock, where he would be centrally placed, and in a good position to control the evacuation of Penhouet Island and subsequent re-embarkation at the Old Mole.

The following summary shows the composition of the Groups, together with the individual tasks of each party; for convenience, a brief reference has been included, indicating which parties actually succeeded in getting ashore.

A. LANDING AT OLD MOLE.

GROUP I, commanded by CAPTAIN E. S. HODGSON.

PARTY AND TASK	EMBARKED IN	REMARKS
CAPTAIN D. BIRNEY: 14 ALL RANKS. Assault 2 pill boxes on Old Mole, (A)[1]. Form bridgehead at landward end of Old Mole and protect M.Ls. berthing there for withdrawal	M.L.447 (No. 9)	Failed to get alongside
CAPTAIN E. S. HODGSON: 15 ALL RANKS. Assault 2 flak positions on East Jetty (B). Form protection post at landward end of East Jetty: picket and patrol built-up area opposite Old Mole	M.L.341 (No. 10). Transferred to M.L.446, (No. 15), 1830/27.	Failed to get alongside
LIEUT. P. WALTON: 10 ALL RANKS. Destroy northern lock gate and operating mechanism and lifting bridge across South Entrance (C)	M.L.457 (No. 11)	Landed successfully
CAPTAIN W. H. PRITCHARD, LIEUT. W. H. WATSON: 7 ALL RANKS. Demolition control party	M.L.457 (No. 11)	Landed successfully
CAPT. E. W. BRADLEY: 7 ALL RANKS: 2 MEDICAL ORDERLIES. Destroy centre lock gate, South Entrance (D). Covering party for demolition work in Power Station (E)	M.L.307 (No. 12)	Failed to get alongside
LIEUT. J. A. BONVIN: 15 ALL RANKS. Destroy Power Station and Boilerhouse near South Entrance (E)	M.L.443 (No. 13)	Failed to get alongside
LIEUT. R. O. C. SWAYNE: 14 ALL RANKS. Destroy swing bridge and 2 lock gates across south end of South Entrance	M.L.306 (No. 14)	Failed to get alongside

[1] Letters in brackets refer to Plan 6.

B. LANDING AT OLD ENTRANCE.

GROUP II, commanded by CAPTAIN M. BURN.

PARTY AND TASK	EMBARKED IN	REMARKS
CAPTAIN M. BURN : 14 ALL RANKS. Destroy 2 flak towers at north end of Penhouet Island and flak position on building across adjacent swing bridge (G). Form defensive block at north end of Normandie Dock and cover approach along east side of Penhouet Basin	M.L.192 (No. 1)	Ran ashore near East Jetty
LIEUT. M. WOODCOCK : 14 ALL RANKS. Destroy 2 lock gates and operating mechanism and swing bridge across Old Entrance (H)	M.L.262 (No. 2)	Troops landed but forced to re-embark
R.S.M. A. Moss : 14 ALL RANKS. Reserve : engage enemy vessels in St. Nazaire Basin	M.L.267 (No. 3)	Troops landed but forced to re-embark
LIEUT. M. JENKINS, LIEUT. H. PENNINGTON: 15 ALL RANKS. Destroy swing bridge at north end of St. Nazaire Basin (J)	M.L.268 (No. 4)	Failed to get alongside
CAPTAIN R. H. HOOPER : 15 ALL RANKS. Assault guns on waterfront between Old Mole and Old Entrance (K). Fire on any vessel in dock. Come in to reserve	M.L.156 (No. 5)	Failed to get alongside
T.S.M. G. HAINES : 14 ALL RANKS. Assist Captain Hooper's party	M.L.177 (No. 6)	Landed successfully

C. LANDING AT SOUTH LOCK, NORMANDIE DOCK, FROM H.M.S. CAMPBELTOWN.

GROUP III, commanded by MAJOR W. O. COPELAND.

PARTY AND TASK	REMARKS
CAPTAIN D. ROY : 14 ALL RANKS. Assault flak positions at S.W. Corner of Normandie Dock and on roof of pumping-house. Form bridgehead to cover withdrawal of all parties across Old Entrance, and resist possible attack from escort vessels in St. Nazaire basin	
LIEUT. J. RODERICK : 14 ALL RANKS Assault flak positions at S.E. Corner of Normandie Dock and in vicinity of fuel storage to eastward of dock. Destroy fuel storage units (L). Prevent enemy from approaching from area to the north-east of dock	
LIEUT. S. W. CHANT : 22 ALL RANKS Destroy main pumping-house and caisson-operating machinery in winding hut at south end of Normandie Dock (M)	All landed according to plan
LIEUT. W. W. ETCHES : 17 ALL RANKS. Destroy caisson at north end of Normandie Dock, and operating machinery in winding hut (N)	
MAJOR W. O. COPELAND : 8 ALL RANKS. Military Second-in-Command : responsible for organisation of re-embarkation	

This, then was the military plan. In the event it achieved a remarkable degree of success as far as the demolitions were concerned, but the heavy casualties suffered from the outset by the motor launches foredoomed the withdrawal to failure.

Taking the landings in turn, at the Old Mole, as already mentioned (see *Sec.* 6), out of the six motor launches carrying Group I, one only succeeded in landing her troops. This party, which included Captain Pritchard, the principal demolition Officer, had as its task the destruction of the lifting gate across the South Entrance and the adjacent lock gate. How this party fared is not known ; later, Colonel Newman noticed two small vessels sunk across the north end of the South Entrance lock, which he presumed to be the work of some of them.[1] Since no other troops of Group I got ashore, their part in the plan was perforce omitted ; neither the power station nor the South Entrance locks were destroyed and for some time the only fighting troops in this area were five men under Lieutenant Watson, who had landed from M.L.457 as protection for her demolition party. They remained in the vicinity of the Old Mole, fighting fiercely—a diversion subsequently of great value to the troops withdrawing from Penhouet Island, with whom they eventually linked up.

At the Old Entrance, Group II had little better fortune. Here again one motor launch only—M.L.177 (No. 6)—managed to land her party.[2] This was one of the assault parties detailed to deal with the water front guns to the southward ; it subsequently joined up with Colonel Newman, who had landed just afterwards from M.G.B.314. Group II's objectives on Penhouet Island were thus left unmolested—with one exception. The two flak towers at the northern end of the island had been the objective of a party under Captain Burn, embarked in M.L.192, the leading craft of the Starboard Column. This motor launch, it will be remembered, had been set on fire and forced ashore while still south of the Old Mole. She fetched up somewhere near the East Jetty. From this position, Captain Burn managed to struggle ashore and, finding his way all alone right across the two islands, set fire to the flak towers, which, as it chanced, were unoccupied. Meanwhile, Colonel Newman, on arrival at the house earmarked for his headquarters, had found it already occupied by a German headquarters. At the same time, his party came under point blank fire from one or two vessels in the St. Nazaire basin and heavy plunging fire from the roofs of a nearby house and the submarine shelters. Most of the H.Q. Staff had been lost in M.L.267, and the arrival of the party under T. S. M. Haines from M.L.177 shortly afterwards was very welcome. The enemy guns and craft were engaged with a 2-inch mortar with good effect and the German headquarters personnel were dealt with by hand grenades. By this time explosions were taking place in the Normandie Dock area and Colonel Newman took up a position to check up the returning demolition parties and direct them to the Old Mole. In small groups they came over the Old Entrance bridge, each one reporting success.

Indeed, in that area, everything had gone almost exactly as planned. Led by their assault parties, the troops had scrambled down from the CAMPBELTOWN's forecastle as soon as she struck the caisson. The flak positions east and west of the entrance were speedily silenced by the assault parties led

[1] The destruction of these vessels by some of the Commando troops was subsequently confirmed by captured German documents.

[2] M.Ls. No. 262 (No. 2) and 267 (No. 3), having missed the Old Entrance at the first attempt, succeeded in landing their troops there later on : but they were repulsed and forced to re-embark.

respectively by Lieutenant Roderick and Captain Roy. The former then advanced over the top of the oil fuel storage for about 100 yards ; running into heavy opposition, they held a perimeter on this line. Captain Roy's party, after silencing two guns on the roof of the pumping-house, which they reached by scaling ladders, formed the bridgehead north of the Old Entrance, for the first stage of the withdrawal.

Meanwhile, on Penhouet Island, Lieutenant Chant's demolition party destroyed the machinery in the southern winding hut and the nearby pumping-house, while further north, Lieutenant Etches with his party wrecked the northern caisson, destroyed the winding hut machinery and finally set fire to the hut itself. All this work was completed in about an hour (by approximately 0230).

Group III had thus completed all its tasks, an achievement the more remarkable in view of the fact that many of the troops had been severely wounded in the CAMPBELTOWN before ever they got ashore. The only disappointment lay in the failure (for some unexplained reason) of the incendiary bombs dropped down the ventilators of the fuel installation to set it on fire.

All this was very cheering, as was the report on the CAMPBELTOWN and the evacuation of the wounded from her made by Major Copeland, who arrived with his small headquarters party a few minutes later. Major Copeland had fallen in with Captain Burn, and so knew that he alone of his party had reached Penhouet Island ; this left only Lieutenant Pennington's party unaccounted for there[1] and Colonel Newman decided that the time had come to withdraw to the Old Mole area.

The first step was to call in Captain Roy's bridgehead party from Penhouet Island. Since the withdrawal rockets had been lost, this had to be done by runner—a duty gallantly performed by Corporal Harrington, who succeeded in crossing the bridge over the Old Entrance under heavy fire, and returned, followed in due course by the party.

By this time—about 0245—Colonel Newman had moved to a position just west of the Old Mole. It was not until his arrival there that he realised that the St. Nazaire Island demolition parties had not got ashore and that consequently the South Entrance locks, etc., were probably still intact. A few moments' reflection convinced him of the impossibility of carrying out these demolitions with the troops at his disposal, since all the explosive charges had either been used, or sunk in the motor launches.

There was a "good sized battle going on in the old Mole area."[2] Colonel Newman first busied himself trying to get an idea of what was happening, while Major Copeland organised a very effective protective screen round the base of the Mole. The mole itself was still in enemy hands, no motor launches were alongside and the general view of the river presented a picture of burning and sinking craft. Clearly there could be no withdrawal by water. On the other hand it was essential to escape from the dock side as quickly as possible. "It was the focal point for all German reinforcements to make for ; there was no room to manoeuvre, and six tons of unexploded explosive was just behind us,"[2] (in the CAMPBELTOWN).

The scene at the bridgehead at this time was well nigh indescribable "Fires and smoke were everywhere and small arms fire was coming from most

[1] This party had never got ashore, having been blown up in M.L.268.

[2] Colonel Newman's Narrative.

of the buildings around us. . . Everyone was behaving magnificently and coolly returning the fire with ever decreasing ammunition."[1] Several nearby railway trucks afforded good cover for the 80 or 90 commandos congregated in the area; near one of these trucks Colonel Newman reviewed the situation with Major Copeland and the Adjutant, Captain Day. A stick grenade fell at their feet and burst; miraculously, not one of them suffered a scratch. In this desperate pass Colonel Newman decided to break inland, in the hope of eventually reaching Spain.

To carry out this attempt, the troops were rapidly organised into parties of about twenty and the leaders were instructed to fight their way inland separately, using "fire and movement" as they advanced. The inner bridge over the South Lock offered the best prospects of escape, but enemy fire rendered a direct approach from the Mole impossible, and most of the parties moved off righthanded to try to work their way round and carry the bridge from its northern flank. Good progress was made, despite the fact that more than half the survivors were wounded by this time.

Colonel Newman's group paused for a while in a bomb hole made by the R.A.F. where a railway shed had once been, and then made for the Inner basin. Finely led by Captain Roy, they fought their way to the bridge, which they rushed under heavy fire, the bullets ricochetting off the girders over their heads,[2] and burst into the town—a smaller party, but still able to move. "The sequence of events during the next half hour," wrote Colonel Newman, "I cannot adequately describe. We seemed to be one moment jumping over a wall into someone's back garden, bursting through houses into the road . . . I remember going head first through a window into somebody's kitchen—there to see the breakfast or supper laid out on a check table cloth and thinking how odd it all was. The next moment we were dashing along a road when an armoured car appeared with the turret spitting fire on all and sundry—including Germans—we were lucky to find a small alley to dodge into as she passed. Someone scored a good hit as a motor cycle and sidecar, full of Germans, came dashing across a square. The troops pitched out and the bike crashed into a wall."

This hectic rush could not go on indefinitely, however. Major Copeland found a lorry, which seemed to offer a chance of getting to the open country, but no effort could persuade it to start. By this time dawn was breaking, ammunition was running very short, and the wounded, some of whom, like Lieut. Etches, had been badly hit before landing, but yet had completed their tasks in the docks and kept up in the wild rush through the town, were in sore need of rest and treatment. Every cross road seemed picquetted with an enemy machine gun and movement was very difficult so shelter was sought in a convenient cellar, where wounds were dressed and plans laid to continue the following evening.

In the course of the day, however, they were discovered by a German

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[1] Colonel Newman's Narrative.

[2] Colonel Newman believed that the Germans in their excitement had forgotten to lower their sights.

search party, and being in a hopeless position to fight down there, there was nothing left for it but surrender.[1]

The other parties which had split up met with varying success, but most suffered a similar fate to that of Colonel Newman's, being rounded up within the next twenty-four hours. Not all of this determined force, however, fell into the hands of the enemy ; five of them—Corporal Wheeler, Lance-Corporals Douglas, Howarth and Sims, and Private Harding eluded capture, and after remarkable adventures reached England in due course.

8. The Withdrawal

To return to the Naval force. Having decided that no more could be done at St. Nazaire, Commander Ryder headed to the southward at 24 knots at 0250/28. During her withdrawal, M.G.B.314 was flood-lit by searchlights and subjected to intense fire from both banks of the river. When abreast of the south mole she passed a surviving motor launch for which she laid smoke, at the same time ordering her to follow. As they passed Les Morees Tower the coastal artillery opened fire and straddled them continuously until they reached the neighbourhood of Le Chatelier Shoal—about 4 miles from the land—shell splinters causing further casualties on board M.G.B.314.

When at last they were getting out of the searchlight beams, they encountered an armed trawler, which opened an unpleasantly heavy fire, but fortunately did no serious damage. Soon afterwards, M.L.270 (No. 7) was met, damaged and steering from aft ; she was capable, however, of 15 knots and joined the motor-gunboat. Ten minutes later a short action was seen taking place to the north-westward and course was altered to the southward to keep clear. Another action to the south-westward was observed at 0330, and a

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[1] H.M. The King approved the award of the Victoria Cross to Lieut.-Colonel A. C. Newman when the full story of the raid became known.

". . . Although Lieut.-Colonel Newman need not have landed himself, he was one of the first ashore, and during the next five hours of bitter fighting, he personally entered several houses and shot up the occupants and supervised the operations in the town, utterly regardless of his own safety, and he never wavered in his resolution to carry through the operation upon which so much depended.

An enemy gun position on the roof of a U-boat pen had been causing heavy casualties to the landing craft and Lieut.-Colonel Newman directed the fire of a mortar against this position to such effect that the gun was silenced. Still fully exposed he then brought machine gun fire to bear on an armed trawler in the harbour, compelling it to withdraw and thus preventing many casualties in the main demolition area.

Under the brilliant leadership of this officer the troops fought magnificently and held vastly superior enemy forces at bay, until the demolition parties had successfully completed their work of destruction.

By this time, however, most of the landing craft had been sunk or set on fire and evacuation by sea was no longer possible. Although the main objective had been achieved Lieut.-Colonel Newman, nevertheless was now determined to try and fight his way out into open country and so give all survivors a chance to escape.

The only way out of the harbour area lay across a narrow iron bridge covered by enemy machine guns, and although severely shaken by a German hand grenade, which had burst at his feet, Lieut.-Colonel Newman personally led the charge which stormed the position and under his inspiring leadership, the small force fought its way through the streets to a point near the open country when, all ammunition expended, he and his men were finally overpowered by the enemy.

The outstanding gallantry and devotion to duty of this fearless officer, his brilliant leadership and initiative, were largely responsible for the success of this perilous operation which resulted in heavy damage to the important Naval base at St. Nazaire."—*London Gazette, 15th June*, 1945.

very heavy explosion in the direction of St. Nazaire at 0400 signified—it was hoped—the end of the CAMPBELTOWN and the lock gate.[1]

The rendezvous—position Y—was reached at 0430, but in view of possible interference by the five enemy torpedo boats reported the previous evening, Commander Ryder continued to the westward at 12 knots.

The reality of this danger was proved by the fate which overtook M.L.306 an hour later. This motor launch, after vain attempts to get alongside the Old Mole, had left St. Nazaire about 0200, and under cover of smoke succeeded in making the passage down river. At 0530, when 45 miles out, she sighted several large vessels approaching her fine on the port bow. These were the torpedo boats returning from their sweep.

Uncertain as to whether they were friend or foe, the Commanding Officer (Lieutenant Henderson), stopped engines, hoping to escape notice in the dark, and the enemy passed within 100 yards of her. On re-starting her engines, however, she was sighted by the rear ship and illuminated by searchlights. The enemy at once opened fire with short range weapons, then attempted to ram, and as she drew away engaged her with main armament at about 50 yards range. With but one Oerlikon—the remainder of her armament had been put out of action up river—and two Lewis guns manned by Commandos, M.L.306 put up a gallant fight against overwhelming odds ; in a few minutes her Commanding Officer had been killed and the remainder of her Officers and nearly everyone on board wounded. In this desperate situation, Sergeant Durrant, R.E., though hit in many places and mortally wounded, continued to engage the enemy with his Lewis gun to the last, earning the admiration of both friend and foe. Eventually, with nearly all on board incapacitated and no means of continuing the fight, there was nothing left for it but surrender. The survivors were taken off by one of the torpedo boats,[2] which then continued to

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[1] This was believed at the time, but it has since been established that the CAMPBELTOWN did not blow up till shortly before noon that day, (according to German sources, at 1146 B.S.T.). A search of the ship for explosives by the German mine-disposal squad had been prevented owing to a misunderstanding on the part of the officer who had the ship cordoned off. At the moment of the explosion, there was a large number of people on board, some of them officials searching for secret documents, etc., and others merely sightseers. The casualty roll was heavy, with over 100 missing. See *Apps. E and F.*

[2] H.M. The King approved the posthumous award of the Victoria Cross to Sergeant Thomas Frank Durrant, R.E. (attached Commandos) for "gallantry, skill and devotion to duty when in charge of a Lewis gun in H.M.S. M.L.306 in the St. Nazaire raid.

M.L.306 came under heavy fire while proceeding up the River Loire towards the port. Sergeant Durrant in his position abaft the bridge, where he had no cover or protection, engaged enemy gun positions and searchlights on shore. During this engagement he was severely wounded in the arm, but refused to leave his gun.

The motor launch subsequently went down river and was attacked by a German destroyer at 30 to 60 yards range and often closer. In this action, Sergeant Durrant continued to fire at the destroyer's bridge with the greatest coolness and with complete disregard of the enemy's fire. The motor launch was illuminated by the enemy searchlights and Sergeant Durrant drew on himself the individual attention of the enemy guns and was again wounded in many places. Despite these further wounds, he stayed in his exposed position, still firing his gun, although after a time only able to support himself by holding on to the gun mounting.

After a running fight, the Commander of the German destroyer called on the motor launch to surrender. Sergeant Durrant's answer was a further burst of fire at the destroyer's bridge. Although now very weak he went on firing, using drums of ammunition as fast as they could be replaced. A renewed attack by the enemy vessel eventually silenced the fire of the motor launch, but Sergeant Durrant refused to give up until the destroyer came alongside, grappled the motor launch and took prisoner those who remained alive. Sergeant Durrant's gallant fight was commended by the German officials on boarding the motor launch.

This very gallant non-commissioned officer later died of the many wounds received in action."—*London Gazette, 15th June,* 1945.

the eastward and an hour later fought a brief engagement with the TYNEDALE and ATHERSTONE.[1]

These two actions were seen from M.G.B.314, though at the time it was of course not known who were engaged.

At dawn[2] the atmosphere cleared and the visibility became extreme; Commander Ryder reduced speed to 8 knots and ordered M.L.270 to open to 3 miles. Another motor launch was sighted some way astern and M.G.B.314 had just altered course to close her, when the TYNEDALE and ATHERSTONE appeared over the horizon.

9. Destroyer Action, Dawn, 28/3. (*Plan 7*).

After parting company at 2200/27, the TYNEDALE and ATHERSTONE had patrolled[3] to the north-westward of position Z until 0420/28, when course was shaped for the 0600 rendezvous in position Y. Nothing was sighted, but a report of four destroyers 40 miles to the westward at 2230/27, apparently escorting southbound merchant vessels, was received from aircraft.

Between 0218 and 0325/28 "leaving" signals from M.Ls. 6, 7, 8, 12 and 13 were received by the TYNEDALE,[4] and at 0420 the wake of the first motor launch coming out was sighted. Two others passed to the westward at 0430, land yet another pair at 0450.

At 0540 the destroyers were at the rendezvous, and spreading 5 miles apart, steered 248° at 15 knots, the TYNEDALE being to the northward.[5]

As dawn was breaking—at 0630—the TYNEDALE sighted five enemy torpedo boats 4 miles on her starboard bow, bearing 273°. She at once altered course to port to close the ATHERSTONE at full speed and at 0635 the enemy opened fire, to which she replied. The ATHERSTONE also turned to port with the object of drawing the enemy away from the motor launches to the westward, and steadied on 170°. Though she could not see the enemy through the TYNEDALE'S smoke she was straddled at a range of 15,000 yards. The TYNEDALE scored a hit on the third ship in the enemy's line herself receiving two hits, which fortunately did little damage. The engagement lasted only nine minutes, for at 0640, the enemy turned away under smoke and firing ceased four minutes later. Their subsequent movements are unknown, but at the time it seemed probable that they would renew the attack, and the TYNEDALE and ATHERSTONE therefore steered to the south-westward with the

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[1] See *Section* 9 (postea).

[2] Sunrise, 0700, 28th March.

[3] Before settling down to the patrol, the ATHERSTONE carried out a short search for the motor launch which had broken down—M.L.341 (No. 10)—but failed to find her in the dark.

[4] 0217. From M.L.270 (No. 7) Still in.
0220. From M.L.177 (No. 6) Leaving, 15 knots.
0220. From M.L.160 (No. 8) Leaving, one engine only.
0221. From M.L.307 (No. 12) Leaving, 15 knots.
0222. From M.L.270 (No. 7) Steering broken down.
0316. From M.L.270 (No. 7) Leaving, 12 knots.
0320. From M.L.160 (No. 8) to M.L.270 (No. 7) "Whatchur, chum."
0323. From M.L.307 (No. 12) Leaving, 12 knots.

[5] The C.O. H.M.S. ATHERSTONE points out that by the time the destroyers arrived at the rendezvous there was an unknown number of M.Ls. in an unknown condition to seaward of them, and suggests that it would have been better if they had steered for the R/V on receipt of the first leaving signals, so as to check up on the M.Ls. as they came out, and give the earliest possible assistance with casualties.

intention of taking off as many of the crews of the motor launches as possible before the enemy returned.

At 0702, two motor launches were sighted ahead, which proved to be M.Ls.270 (No. 7) and 156 (No. 5). The wounded were taken off and the latter was found to be so badly damaged that it was decided she must be abandoned.

The ATHERSTONE had just opened fire to sink her when a Heinkel 115 appeared, and she left her to close two other motor craft—M.G.B.314 and M.L.446 (No. 15)—sighted at that moment (0739). The Heinkel bombed and sank the abandoned M.L.156 some three-quarters of an hour later.

As time went on and the enemy torpedo boats did not re-appear, it became possible to follow the original plan of getting the motor launches home with their crews.

At 0745/28 M.G.B.314 reached the ATHERSTONE and was towed alongside in the "glass calm" sea while the wounded were transferred. She had been holed in the forepeak, but it seemed probable she could make the passage home,[1] and her crew—reduced to four seamen—was made up by volunteers from the destroyer.

As soon as these arrangements had been made, Commander Ryder and his staff re-embarked in the ATHERSTONE, and with the TYNEDALE, M.G.B.314, and M.Ls.270 (No. 7) and 446 (No. 15), proceeded to the westward to meet the destroyers CLEVELAND and BROCKLESBY which had left Plymouth the previous evening to reinforce the escort for the return passage.

10. Return Passage, 28th/29th March (*Plan* 3).

The CLEVELAND and BROCKLESBY had reached a position approximately 120 miles W.S.W. of St. Nazaire (lat. 46° 39′ N., long. 5° 00′ W.), when at 0644/28 they intercepted a signal reporting that the TYNEDALE and ATHERSTONE were engaging the enemy torpedo boats. They at once increased to full speed, steering for the position given, then some 80 miles ahead. After half an hour a large trawler was sighted to port. As she wore no colours and altered course away to the north-eastward at increased speed on their approach, she was taken to be an enemy look-out vessel. Seven or eight salvos were fired at her at 4,000 yards range, leaving her damaged and stopped.

At 0809 M.L.443 (No. 13) was sighted ahead. Her upper deck was crowded with men and she was making slowly to the westward at about 10 knots. When communication had with difficulty been established, she reported that she was leaking, and asked for medical assistance. This, however, could not then be given on account of the urgent necessity of reinforcing the TYNEDALE and ATHERSTONE, which, from intercepted signals, were believed still to be in action. Two other motor launches—M.Ls.160 (No. 8) and 307 (No. 12)—which were sighted on the starboard bow a quarter of an hour later were instructed to join M.L.443 (No. 13).

Just before this meeting an enemy aircraft was sighted and engaged; from then until about 1415, shadowing by He.115's and Ju.88's was continuous.

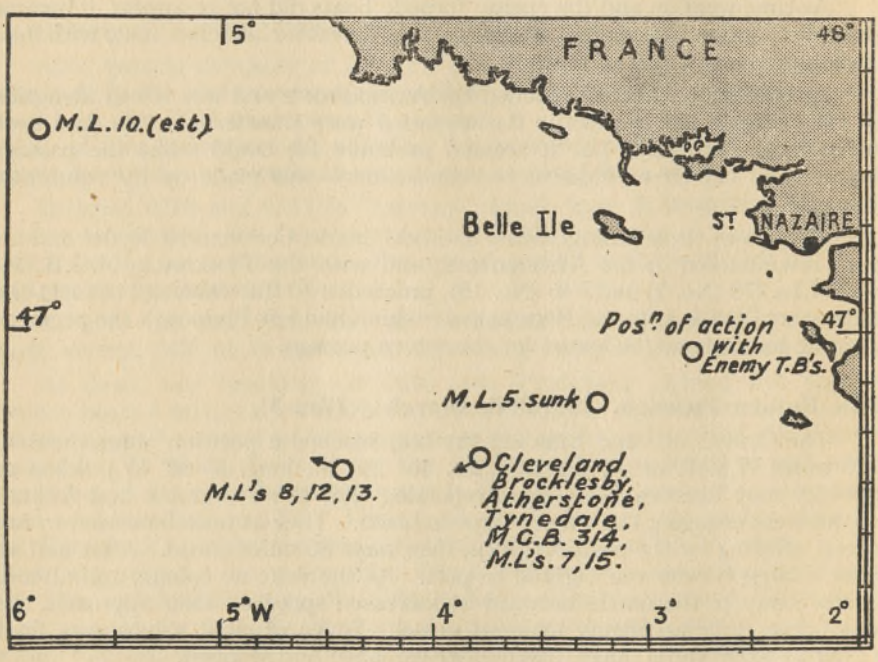
Junction with Commander Ryder's force was effected about 0900/28 in lat. 46° 35′ N., long. 3° 49′ W., and Commander Sayer (CLEVELAND), who was the Senior Officer, assumed command.

After an exchange of signals it was clear to him that there was no im-

[1] She had received five hits in one petrol tank, which did not catch fire as it was full.

mediate hope of engaging the enemy torpedo boats, which had not been seen for two hours.

It was improbable that there were any more motor launches to the eastward. The three small craft in company were seriously damaged, and a large number of survivors, many of them serious casualties, were on board the TYNEDALE and ATHERSTONE. (See *Plan* 7). He therefore decided to continue the withdrawal by the pre-arranged route, and organised the destroyers in two divisions disposed abeam with the motor launches between them, as being the best formation for A/A defence.



Situation at 0900, 28 March.

Enemy air activity was increasing, and all ships were frequently in action. Their gunfire was successful in keeping the aircraft at a distance, and no serious attacks developed. At 0942/28, a Beaufighter which had made contact with the ATHERSTONE at 0822 shot down a Ju.88 on the port beam, shortly afterwards itself crashing from a very low altitude. No survivors could be found. Another Ju.88 was shot down astern by the BROCKLESBY at 1006 and several others were seen to be hit. Not until 1000 did the air situation permit the medical officers of the CLEVELAND and BROCKLESBY to be transferred to the TYNEDALE and ATHERSTONE, where their assistance was urgently required.

Throughout the forenoon the force continued to the westward at a speed dictated by the conditions of the motor launches. From 16 knots this gradually dropped to 10 knots, and even this could not be maintained. All three boats were making water, had serious engine trouble, and were short of fuel. There were signs that a heavy air attack was imminent, and attack by surface vessels was considered not unlikely.

In view of these circumstances, and also of the desirability of getting the

critically wounded to port as soon as possible, the question of abandoning the motor craft had to be considered.

Shortly after noon floatplanes diving out of low cloud attacked the ATHERSTONE and CLEVELAND, and small bombs fell near both, without inflicting damage or casualties. No British aircraft had been seen since the Beaufighter crashed at 0942/28, but about 1230 another arrived and escorted for some 50 minutes, when it engaged a He.115 and disappeared to the southward. Two Hudsons then made contact, but only remained in company for a few minutes.[1]

The three motor craft were then ordered alongside the BROCKLESBY for examination, as a result of which Commander Sayer reluctantly decided they must be abandoned.[2] The crews and such gear as time permitted were removed, and at 1343/28, M.G.B.314 and the two motor launches were sunk by gunfire—a melancholy end after all they had come through.[3]

At 1350/28, the four destroyers continued their passage to the westward at 25 knots, hoping to overtake the three motor launches sighted by the CLEVELAND in the early morning. Nothing was seen of them, however, and at 1530/28, course was altered to the northward. At 1850, a mutilated signal was intercepted from M.L.443 (No. 13) giving her 1545 position as 46° 55′ N., 7° 07′ W., and asking for immediate help. This position was 85 miles 210° from the CLEVELAND and Commander Sayer immediately decided to detach the ATHERSTONE, and TYNEDALE with the wounded to Plymouth, while the CLEVELAND and BROCKLESBY swept towards M.L.13's estimated position.[4] They parted company at 1900/28, and Commander Ryder then sent a brief report to the Commander-in-Chief, who was still entirely ignorant of the course of events.[5] The remainder of the passage was without incident, and the ATHERSTONE and TYNEDALE passed the Eddystone at 0125/29.

Soon after parting company, the CLEVELAND and BROCKLESBY intercepted further signals from M.L.443 (No. 13) indicating that she was making for the Scilly Islands through lat. 47° 07′ N., long. 7° 50′ W., with the other two motor launches in company; the sweep was organised accordingly, but nothing was seen of the motor launches.

In the morning, the destroyers FERNIE, ALBRIGHTON and KUJAWIAK joined the CLEVELAND, and the search was continued till 1315/29, when all destroyers were recalled to harbour by the Commander-in-Chief, the three

[1] These were the only British aircraft sighted by the destroyers but the Commander-in-Chief, Plymouth, remarks that "aircraft of No. 19 Group, R.A.F. did much useful work in covering the withdrawal of the forces from St. Nazaire. Twenty sorties occupying 105 flying hours, were carried out during which one H.E.111 and two He.115 were encountered, and one enemy aircraft was destroyed."

[2] The Commander-in-Chief, Plymouth, regretted this decision, with which he did not agree.

[3] This was in lat. 46° 38′ N., long, 4° 52′ W. (about 110 miles W.S.W. of St. Nazaire) according to the CLEVELAND'S reckoning. The ATHERSTONE put it about 6 miles to the northward.

[4] Thereby anticipating the wishes of the Commander-in-Chief, Plymouth, who, at 1926 ordered him to detach two destroyers to the assistance of the motor launches, and at the same time informed him that two Hudsons were proceeding to locate them.

[5] It had been intended to send this report early in the forenoon, the position of the force being then known to the enemy from air reconnaissance. Just then a signal was received from the Commander-in-Chief imposing stricter W/T silence. A Hudson aircraft sent for the purpose of receiving the report by visual failed to make contact. During the afternoon, when the force was nearing the Brest Peninsula and shadowing aircraft had apparently been shaken off, it seemed even more necessary to maintain W/T silence. The progress made by 1900 and the desirability of requesting air search for the missing M.Ls. decided Commander Sayer to break it, and the signal was sent at 1946/28.

missing motor launches having arrived at Falmouth that forenoon. Their passage home had not been without incident.

After passing the CLEVELAND at 0830/28, M.Ls.160 and 307, had joined M.L.443. The Senior Officer was Lieutenant Platt, who had been rescued by M.L.160 (No. 8) when M.L.447 (No. 9) was disabled at the Old Mole. Having shifted to M.L.443 (No. 13),[1] he decided, as there was no sign of British aircraft or destroyers, to run out to 8° W. before making to the northward.

At 1525/28, a Heinkel circled the three motor launches, and after flashing the correct British challenge, came in from astern, and was shot down by rapid fire. A couple of hours later a Blohm and Voss seaplane was observed shadowing. This aircraft attacked at 1800, and was driven off after dropping one bomb. He again came in to attack half an hour later when he was apparently hit and flew off to the westward. It was then that Lieutenant Platt sent a message requesting an escort.

Course was held to the westward till sunset,[2] and then altered up the 8th meridian. At 0130/29, Ushant being abeam by dead reckoning, course was altered for the Scilly Islands which, however, had not been sighted by 0900/29. A signal was sent asking for a D/F bearing, but before this came through the Lizard was sighted, and they proceeded into Falmouth.

The remnant of the gallant 10th A/S Striking Force was once more at home. Of the 18 small craft which had sailed three days previously, 10 had been sunk by the enemy, four by their own side during the return passage, and only four remained. Thirty-four officers (55 per cent) and 157 ratings (53.5 per cent) out of 62 officers and 291 ratings were missing[3] or killed ; but their task had been brilliantly accomplished, and—in the words of the Commander-in-Chief—"taking into consideration the extreme vulnerability of the coastal craft, neither the losses in men or material can be considered as excessive for the results achieved."

11. Results and Lessons

It was not possible to estimate the full results of the raid, but enough was known to regard it as a distinct success. The main object was to disable the large lock, and this was achieved. In addition to the destruction of the outer caisson by the CAMPBELTOWN,[4] the pumping station and operating mechanism of both outer and inner caissons were destroyed. Other port facilities, including possibly the caisson at the Old Entrance were also destroyed ; the enemy suffered considerable casualties, partly by their own fire, and at least two ships in the harbour were damaged.

The moral effect must have been considerable, and may well have caused a diversion of troops and armament to Biscay ports.

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[1] Lieut. Platt had been transferred from M.L.443 (No. 13), on leaving Falmouth, to M.L.447 (No. 9), in order to relieve her C.O.—Lieut. Wood, who had fallen sick—as S.O., 2nd Flotilla.

[2] About 1905 B.S.T.

[3] About 55 per cent of these, including Lt. Com. Beatty, V.C. proved to have been taken prisoner and returned to the United Kingdom on the conclusion of hostilities. The final figure for killed or missing was 85 officers and men.

[4] Photographs taken from the air at 1650/29/3 showed the seaward entrance of the lock dock open, the gate apparently missing, and the dock flooded. Two 450ft. tankers previously seen were still in the lock dock, the outermost emitting smoke, and the innermost with a slight list. There was much oil on the surface in the dock and harbour.

To these gains there could be added damage to a U-boat and the destruction of a number of enemy aircraft by the British forces—naval and air—on their way there and back.

Commenting on the operation, the Commander-in-Chief, Plymouth, remarked that for success, surprise was essential. The unseen passage to the Loire was due partly to favourable weather conditions, and partly to careful routeing to keep the force clear of the track of enemy reconnaissance flights. The prompt action of the TYNEDALE which resulted in the probable sinking of the U-boat on the morning of 27/3 was an important contribution to the success of this part of the operation.

In the later stages the large measure of surprise achieved was due to the stratagems employed by Commander Ryder, which the Commander-in-Chief described as "admirable and carefully worked out beforehand." It was fortunate that no patrols were met in the shoal waters of the approach. That surprise was not complete was principally owing to the bombing policy adopted. The weather—always a doubtful factor—prevented accurate location of targets by the bombers, which consequently did not drop their bombs, but their presence overhead was sufficient to put all the enemy defences on the alert and when the alarm was given they were able to concentrate their fire on the motor launches within a few seconds. In the light of this experience the Commander-in-Chief remarked that "bombing unless heavy and continuous, should not take place . . . If any chances exist of achieving complete surprise, it would be better to have no bombing at all on the night of the operation."

With regard to the actual attack, he pointed out that the landing plan was not sufficiently flexible to take advantage of any "soft spot." Such a spot existed near the outer caisson of the large lock and the Old Entrance. This, or the CAMPBELTOWN herself, might have been used when it was found the landings at the Old Mole were impossible.

The great difficulty experienced in putting out of action guns sited on the tops of buildings has already been mentioned.

Though their disabilities were, of course, known before, the Commander-in-Chief commented on the unsuitability of the motor launches for operations of this nature; they were set on fire very easily, they provided little or no protection to the personnel embarked, and they were very noisy.[1]

In conclusion, he regretted that little could be told of the "admirable work ashore of the Commando troops, because unfortunately, none who took part has returned to tell the tale; nor is there any officer from H.M.S. CAMPBELTOWN to give the full story of her gallant exploit.

"Results must be the silent witnesses of their achievement."

[1] On a still night their engines were clearly audible at a distance of 3 miles.

APPENDIX A

Organisation of Naval Forces

SHIP	FLOTILLA NUMBER	COMMANDING OFFICER
		HEADQUARTERS BOAT
		(carrying S.N.O. and Military Commander)
M.G.B.314[1]	0	Lieut. D. M. C. Curtis, R.N.V.R.
		MOTOR LAUNCHES
		1ST FLOTILLA
M.L.192[2]	1	Lieut-Commander W. L. Stephens, R.N.V.R. (S.O., M.Ls.).
M.L.262[2]	2	Lieut. E. A. Burt, R.N.V.R.
M.L.267[2]	3	Lieut. E. H. Beart, R.N.V.R.
M.L.268[2]	4	Lieut. A. D. B. X. Tillie, R.N.V.R.
M.L.156[1]	5	Lieut. L. Fenton, R.N.V.R.
M.L.177[2]	6	Sub-Lieut. M. F. Rodier, R.N.V.R.
M.L.270[1]	7	Lieut. C. S. B. Irwin, R.N.R.
M.L.160	8	Lieut. T. W. Boyd, R.N.V.R.
		2ND FLOTILLA
M.L.447[2]	9	Lieut. T. D. L. Platt, R.N.R.[4] (S.O., 2nd Flot.)
M.L.341	10	Lieut. D. L. Briault, R.N.V.R.
M.L.457[2]	11	Lieut. T. A. M. Collier, R.N.V.R.
M.L.307	12	Lieut. N. B. Wallis, R.A.N.V.R.
M.L.443	13	Lieut. K. Horlock, R.N.V.R.[4]
M.L.306[3]	14	Lieut. I. B. Henderson, R.N.V.R.
M.L.446[1]	15	Lieut. H. G. R. Falconar, R.N.V.R.
M.L.298[2]	16	Sub-Lieut. R. Nock, R.N.V.R.
		MOTOR TORPEDO BOAT
M.T.B.74[2]	17	Sub-Lieut. R. C. M. V. Wynn, R.N.V.R.
		BLOCKSHIP
CAMPBELTOWN	—	Lieut.-Commander. S. H. Beattie, R.N.
		ESCORTING DESTROYERS
TYNEDALE	—	Lieut.-Commander H. E. F. Tweedie, R.N.
ATHERSTONE	—	Lieut.-Commander R. S. Jenks, R.N.
		REINFORCEMENTS FOR RETURN PASSAGE
CLEVELAND	—	Commander G. B. Sayer, R.N.
BROCKLESBY	—	Lieut.-Commander M. N. Tufnell, D.S.C., R.N.

[1] Considered unfit for return journey and sunk by own forces.

[2] Sunk in action.

[3] Captured.

[4] Lieut. Platt took over as S.O., 2nd Flotilla, after the order for proceeding had been made on 26/3, Lieut. Wood, R.N.V.R., the Senior Officer, having fallen sick. The spare C.O., Lieut. Horlock, relieved Lieut. Platt in M.G.3B.44 (No. 13).

APPENDIX B

Summary of Experiences of Motor Launches

1st FLOTILLA

M.L.192 (No. 1) Lieut. Cdr. Stephens.

Hit while going up river in formation and set ablaze. Ran on out of control, and, sheering across bows of Port Column, hit the Old Mole.

M.L.262 (No. 2) Lieut. Burt.

Ran past Old Entrance and turned by Aircraft Carrier *Joffre* (on slip). Came down stream close inshore, passed under stern of CAMPBELTOWN, and landed troops in Old Entrance. Troops repulsed and re-embarked. Embarked second party withdrawing. Backed out and proceeded down stream. Went alongside M.L.457 (No. 11) disabled and under heavy fire off Old Mole. Was hit then, and after drifting was hit again and blew up.

M.L.267 (No. 3) Lieut. Beart.

Missed Old Entrance ; turned by the *Joffre*. Went alongside dredger and attacked with grenades ; then landed troops in Old Entrance, but they were repulsed and re-embarked. Backed out and started down river, but was soon hit and abandoned.

M.L.268 (No. 4) Lieut. Tillie.

Turned in towards Old Entrance, but was hit before reaching shore and blew up.

M.L.156 (No. 5) Lieut. Fenton.

Steering gear hit and one engine put out of action when about half a mile short of objective. C.O., 1st Lieutenant and many of crew and troops wounded. Withdrew on one engine. Crew transferred to ATHERSTONE next morning and M.L. abandoned ; subsequently bombed and sunk by a Heinkel.

M.L.177 (No. 6) Sub-Lieut. Rodier.

Landed troops alongside Old Entrance and then proceeded to port quarter of CAMPBELTOWN and took off about half of crew. Started down river but was hit after about 10 minutes, and burnt for 4 hours. Survivors rescued by German trawler.

M.L.270 (No. 7) Lieut. Irwin.

Stationed ahead with M.G.B.314 and M.L.160. At 0140 received direct hit by heavy shell aft, which wrecked the steering and auxiliary steering gear. Withdrew and subsequently transferred crew to BROCKLESBY, when M.L. was scuttled.

M.L.160 (No. 8) Lieut. Boyd.

Stationed ahead with M.G.B.314 and M.L.270. Successfully engaged flak positions allotted to her and silenced them. Fired torpedo at a ship, believed to be a warship, lying alongside one of the south break-waters. Then to the rescue of M.L.447 (No. 9) off Old Mole in a very gallant manner and withdrew at 0220 on one engine. Returned to England in company with M.Ls. 443 (No. 12) and 307 (No. 13), and with them shot down a Heinkel III on passage.

2nd FLOTILLA

M.L.447 (No. 9) Lieut. Platt.

Leading M.L., Port Column. Unable to get alongside the Old Mole owing to shoal water. Heavily fired on and pelted with grenades; many casualties. Set on fire, backed out and sank. Survivors, including C.O., rescued by M.L.160 (No. 8).

M.L.341 (No. 10) Lieut. Briault.

Did not get up river due to engine trouble. Transferred troops to M.L.446 (No. 15) at 2030/27, and followed at best speed—11 knots—but lost contact and returned to England alone. Sighted one Focke Wolfe about 100 miles west of Ushant, but was not attacked.

M.L.457 (No. 11) Lieut. Collier.

The only M.L. to land her troops successfully at the Old Mole. Circled round and came back alomgside, but was fired on. Went astern to mid stream but then hit and drifted off Old Mole. Refused offer of assistance from M.L.262 (No. 2); hit again later and blew up.

M.L.307 (No. 12) Lieut. Wallis.

Third ship in Port Column. Closed close in to Old Mole, passing M.L.447 (No. 9) as she backed out, and killed at least four Germans who were throwing hand grenades down on her, but suffered many casualties and went aground. After consultation with O.C. troops, backed out, went over to eastern bank of river and engaged batteries and searchlights there. Withdrew at 0230, shooting up a merchant ship on the way out. Met M.L.160 (No. 8) and stood by her. Returned to England with her and M.L.443 (No. 13); assisted to shoot down Heinkel III on passage.

M.L.443 (No. 13) Lieut. Horlock.

Was blinded by searchlights and missed the Old Mole, going a good way further up the river. Returned, but was unable to get alongside, and returned to Falmouth in company with M.Ls. 307 (No. 12) and 160 (No. 8); assisted to shoot down Heinkel III on passage.

M.L.306 (No. 14) Lieut. Henderson.

Made attempts to berth on both sides of the Old Mole, but found each blocked by burning M.Ls. Circled round twice before withdrawing. When 45 miles out, intercepted by German torpedo boats, and surrendered after suffering many casualties, including C.O. killed, in unequal fight.

M.L.446 (No. 15) Lieut. Falconar.

At 2030/27 took on board troops from M.L.341 (No. 10) and overtook force when they were passing the STURGEON. Overshot the Old Mole in the glare of the searchlights, and found herself near the *Joffre*. Returned to attempt landing, but finding most of the troops wounded, including both Officers and the sergeant, withdrew and transferred casualties to the ATHERSTONE next morning, the M.L. being subsequently scuttled.

M.L.298 (No. 16) Sub-Lieut. Nock.

No troops carried. Passed the Old Mole and circled to give covering fire. Went alongside in Old Entrance but found no troops there. Went close in to the Old Mole; backed out into mid-stream. Caught fire passing through burning petrol. Was hit when one mile out and eventually blew up.

APPENDIX C

Armament of British Forces

	4" HA/LA 4" LA	12-pdr.	3-pdr.	2-pdr.	Twin Lewis	Stripped Lewis	Lewis	Oerlikon	0.5in.
M.G.B.314	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	4
M.L.192	—	—	—	—	2	2	—	2	—
M.L.262	—	—	1	—	—	—	6	2	—
M.L.267	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	1	—
M.L.268	—	—	1	—	—	—	4	2	—
M.L.156	—	—	1	—	1	2	—	—	—
M.L.177	—	—	1	—	1	2	—	—	—
M.L.270	—	—	1	—	—	—	10	—	—
M.L.160	—	—	1	—	1	2	—	—	—
M.L.447	—	—	—	—	—	—	8	2	—
M.L.341	—	—	1	1	2	2	—	—	—
M.L.457	—	—	—	—	2	2	—	—	—
M.L.307	—	—	1	1	2	2	—	—	—
M.L.443	—	—	1	1	2	2	—	—	—
M.L.306	—	—	1	—	1	2	—	2	—
M.L.446	—	—	—	—	1	2	—	2	—
M.L.298	—	—	—	1	1	2	—	2	—
M.T.B.74	—	—	—	—	—	10	—	—	—
CAMPBELTOWN ...	3	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	2
ATHERSTONE ...	4	—	—	1	—	—	2	2	—
TYNEDALE	4	—	—	1	—	—	2	2	—
CLEVELAND ...	4	—	—	1	—	—	2	2	—
BROCKLESBY ...	4	—	—	1	—	—	2	2	—

APPENDIX D

Material Results achieved by Raid

(From German Sources)

(1) NORMANDIE DOCK.

Outer gate completely destroyed.

Inner gate damaged by explosive charges, but still served to hold the water from flooding the dock.

Pumping station and caisson operating machinery completely destroyed.

(2) EAST LOCK.

Outer gate completely destroyed by explosion about 1520, 30th March. Inner gate held firm against the rush of water, despite damage sustained in an air raid a few days previously.

(3) SHIPS.

Slight damage to tankers *Schledstadt* and *Passat*, which were in the Normandie dock at the time of the explosion, broke loose from their moorings and collided.

Tugs *Champion* and *Pornic* sunk by British troops in St. Nazaire Basin alongside inner gate of the South lock.

Harbour Defence Vessel lying near East Lock in the St. Nazaire basin scuttled by her C.O.,[1] lest it should fall into British hands.

(4) WHARF INSTALLATIONS.

Workshops opposite the Normandie Dock (Forges de l'Ouest) burned down after fires had been started either by gunfire or explosive charges. Efficiency impaired for a long time afterwards.

(5) GERMAN LOSSES IN PERSONNEL.

42 killed.

Over 100 missing.

127 wounded.

[1] This Officer was killed later in the action.

APPENDIX E

Eye-Witness[1] Account of the Aftermath of the Raid on St. Nazaire

28th March—3rd April, 1942

The following information as to events subsequent to the raid was obtained from a French electrical mechanic employed at the main electrical and radio workshop in the dockyard. The day after the raid 28/3, he was unable to work as the whole port area was closed to the public, but from a house in the town he heard firing punctuated with explosions till about 1000, when there was quiet for a couple of hours. About noon a particularly violent explosion shook the whole city and broke every window within a very large radius.

The next day, 29/3, was a Sunday, and the informant remained at home. A B.B.C. broadcast to which he listened gave the story of the lockgate and the CAMPBELTOWN (which was said to have exploded in the early morning), but made no mention of the explosion at noon.

On 30/3 he proceeded to work as usual, but instead of entering the workshop, which was situated just east of the large lock, he passed on to look at the lockgate reported destroyed. No one stopped him as he walked on beyond his factory.

The lockgate was certainly destroyed, and there was no sign of H.M.S. CAMPBELTOWN beyond some metal debris, but what surprised him most was the surrounding carnage. The whole of the corner on both sides of the lock was littered with legs, arms, heads and entrails. From the scattered pieces, he could see that they belonged to Germans. Military working parties were shovelling the remains together and scattering sand over the ground, in a dazed, disorganised way.

He returned to his workshop, where he learned what had happened from some of the German workmen employed there. The CAMPBELTOWN had crashed into the main gate and was firmly lodged there. She was still there at daybreak, and later a strong cordon of troops had been thrown round the area on both sides of the lock. Meanwhile an inspection party of some 40 senior officers, including the S.N.O. (informant thinks an Admiral), had boarded the ship to see how best she could be moved.[2] Many German soldier sightseers had swelled the numbers round the ship. When she went up they were all wiped out, including the officers on board. Apparently the officer death roll had been heavy on shore as well as on board, and this had a large bearing on subsequent events. The most conservative estimate put this death roll at 300, but many people believed that the figure was nearer 400. Informant believes the higher figure judging from the vast quantity of human remains which on Monday morning still covered the ground.

Work in his factory continued haltingly that day, and in the afternoon informant went over to a ship south of the graving docks to do some W/T repairs. At 1630 hours the port area was shaken by another heavy explosion and everyone rushed back towards the lock to see what had happened. A friend of informant had been working on an electric pylon near the old harbour entrance, and had been thrown off his perch into the water by the explosion. He guessed that a delayed action torpedo had gone off in that lockgate.

At 1730 hours a second explosion shattered the remains of this entrance. Pandemonium broke out. Together with all the other workers in his area informant rushed to the bridge over the remaining lockgate. It was packed full of workmen, both French and German, but the exit was barred by sentries. The workmen overpowered them and rushed on to the bridge throwing bicycles over the barrier. The German sentries opened fire, and this was the signal for general firing to break out all over the port. Machine guns were turned on to the crowds of Frenchmen trying to leave the port. In all 280 French workmen were killed in this indiscriminate slaughter.

Informant had his mate killed by his side, and himself succeeded in taking cover in a trench 100 yards to the north-west of the bridge. Here he stayed till nearly midnight, waiting for the firing to die down. He lay there in the centre of it all. Every kind of gun

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[1] Informant's grade—C.

[2] There were a number of reports that two British Officers gave their lives to accompany the Germans on board the CAMPBELTOWN in order to allay suspicions that she might blow up. These reports have never received confirmation, and it is believed that they had no foundation in fact.

was being fired at a non-existent enemy. The German soldiers having lost so many of their officers in the Saturday mid-day explosion, completely lost their heads and saw British commandos round every corner. Especially they picked on anyone dressed in khaki.

In the port area there was a great number of O.T.[1] men employed on various building jobs. These Germans joined the general panic and were mowed down by machine guns. Their khaki uniforms were mistaken for British battle dresses. Many were killed under our informant's eyes as they ran. Many others were killed in the Penhouet neighbourhood as they left their work. When informant some days later visited this area he found all the houses facing the Avenue de Penhouet—the road north of Penhouet Basin—pockmarked by bullets and shell holes. A heavy battle had obviously been fought here against the imaginary enemy and German O.T. (labour parties) casualties were severe. After darkness the battle continued between the German soldiers themselves, who returned each others' fire to good effect. When after several days, things returned to normal, informant gathered that some 300—400 Germans, O.T. workmen and soldiers, had been killed in this evening battle.

Informant in due course heard the B.B.C. accounts of how the French population had risen and fought the Germans for two or three days after our raid. This was not the case. On the actual morning of the raid, probably less than 50 Frenchmen took up arms. The French in any case had very few arms. Informant knows personally only one Frenchman who fought with us. He was the Sous-chef de la gare at the port goods station. He drew a revolver and was killed in the fighting. The heavy firing from the port area which was heard, and reported as being continued French resistance, was nothing more than this panicky slaughter of unarmed workmen which followed the explosion of the delayed action torpedoes. Informant thinks this would not have happened had the officer death roll not been so heavy on the Monday morning.

From Tuesday till Thursday of that week the whole harbour area was closed and informant could not get to work. During these days the whole population of the old town of St. Nazaire was evacuated to Chateaubriand, and this area was still clear of civilians when informant left St. Nazaire on 15th April. He heard that about 100 hostages were taken from the French population after the raid, but he believes that none was executed. The Germans were satisfied with the wanton massacre of the 280 French workmen.

All the British prisoners were taken by lorry to La Baule. The wounded were dumped in these lorries without medical attention. Only German wounded were taken away in ambulances. This story is borne out by another informant, who states on the authority of a French doctor that the British wounded at St. Nazaire did not receive any medical attention till four days after the attack, when they were taken to the Royal Hotel, La Baule. They spent one day at this hotel, and were then moved to Rennes to the Hopital Complimentaire E.P.S., Rue Jean Mace, Rennes. In this hospital they were treated by French doctors only and their nurses were male Senegalese. The source of this information was a doctor of Rennes, who knew well all the staff of the hospital.

[1] Todt organisation.

INDEX

(Numbers refer to Sections)

Air Attacks, enemy, 10.

Air reconnaissance, enemy, 4, 11.

ABRIGHTON, H.M.S., search for missing M.Ls. 10.

Armament, British Naval Forces, Appendix C.

Astronomical data, 27th—28th March, 3 (note).

ATHERSTONE, H.M.S., escort for 10th A/S S.F., 2, 3 ; Naval and Military Commanders embark in, 3 ; sinks French trawler, 4 ; action with enemy torpedo boats, 9 ; return to Plymouth, 10 ; Appendices A and C.

Beattie, Lieut.-Commander S. H., C.O., H.M.S. CAMPBELTOWN, rams lockgate, 6 ; awarded V.C., 6 (note) ; Appendix A.

Beaufighter, shoots down Ju. 88, and then crashes, 10.

BROCKLESBY, H.M.S. reinforcement to escort, 9 ; shoots down Ju. 88, 10 ; search for missing M.Ls. 10 ; Appendices A and C.

CAMPBELTOWN, H.M.S., role in attack, 2 ; preparation, 3 ; rams lockgate, 5 ; blows up, 8 (and note) ; Appendices A and C.

Casualties, 10.

Chariot, name of operation, 3.

CLEVELAND, H.M.S., reinforcement to escort, 9 ; rendezvous with 10th A/S S.F. and return passage, 10 ; search for missing M.Ls. 10 ; Appendices A and C.

Commander-in-Chief. See Forbes.

Commanding Officers. Appendix A.

Commando. See Troops.

Copeland, Major W. O., Military Second-in-Command, 7.

Cruising order for attack, 3.

Damage, inflicted on enemy 6, 11, App. D ; to M.G.B.314, 9.

Durrant, Sergeant T. F., R.E., awarded V.C. for gallantry in M.L.306, 8 (and note).

FERNIE, H.M.S., search for missing M.Ls. 10.

Fighter aircraft British support, 10 (and note).

Forbes, Admiral of the Fleet, Sir C. M., G.C.B., D.S.O., C. in C. Plymouth, 2, 3 ; remark on Old Mole landings, 6 (note) ; comments on operation, 10, 11.

Forces, British Naval, 3 ; App. A.

KUJAWIAK, Polish destroyer, search for missing M.Ls. 10.

Lessons, learnt from raid, 11.

Loire, description of estuary, 3 (note).

Losses, British Naval, 10.

M.G.B.314, Headquarters Boat, 2 ; endurance, 3 (note) ; leads raiding force, 5 ; in action, 6 ; withdrawal, 8 ; rendezvous with destroyers, 9 ; scuttled, 10 ; Appendices A and C.

M.Ls. role in plan 2 ; organisation 3 ; attempts to land troops, 6 ; withdrawal of survivors; 8, 9, 10 ; two scuttled 10 ; three return independently, 10 ; unsuitability for raids, 11 ; individual narratives, Appendix B ; Appendices A and C.

M.T.B.74, role in plan, 3 ; torpedoes Old Entrance lock, 6, and lost, 6 (note).

Newman, Lieut.-Colonel A. C., The Essex Regt. O.C. Troops, 2 ; embarks in ATHERSTONE, 3 ; transfers to M.G.B.314, 4 ; lands at Old Entrance, 6 ; operations on shore, 7, awarded V.C. 7 (note).

Names, Commando Officers in charge of parties, 7 ; C.Os. H.M. Ships, App. A.

Object of operation, 2.

Plan of attack and withdrawal, 3.

Platt, Lieut. T. D. L., R.N.R., S.O., 2nd M.L. Flotilla, brings three surviving M.Ls. home, 10.

R.D.F., 1 ; value as aid to pilotage, 5 (note).

Results of raid, 11.

Royal Air Force, requested to bomb St. Nazaire, 5 (note) ; but this policy a mistake, 11 ; fighter support to Naval Forces, 10 (and note).

Ryder, Commander R. E. D., R.N., S.N.O., of raiding force, 2 ; embarks in ATHERSTONE, 3 ; transfers to M.G.B.314, 4 ; action on being sighted by enemy, 5 ; report of action and decision to withdraw, 6 ; awarded V.C., 6 (note) ; withdrawal and return passage, 8, 9, 10.

St. Nazaire, 1 ; description of port, 2 ; approach to, 3 ; raid on, 5, 6, 7, 8 ; results of raid, 11, App. D.

Savage, Able Seaman W. A., pom-pom gunlayer, M.G.B.314, killed and posthumously awarded V.C., 6 (and note).

Sayer, Commander G. B., R.N., C.O., H.M.S. CLEVELAND, assumes command of Naval Force, 10 ; decision to sink M.G.B.314 and two M.Ls., and search for Lieut. Platt's three M.Ls., 10.

Security measures, 3.

Stratagems employed by Commander Ryder, 4 (and note), 5, 11.

STURGEON, H.M. Submarine, acts as beacon, 4, 5.

Submarine, German, attacked by H.M.S. TYNEDALE, 4.

Tenth A/S S.F., collective title of raiding force, 3 ; passage to St. Nazaire, 4 ; approach, 5 ; attack, 6 ; return passage, 8, 9, 10.

Tibbits, Lieut. N. T. B., D.S.C., R.N., arranges detonating charges in CAMPBELTOWN, 3 (note) ; steers CAMPBELTOWN into caisson, 6.

Torpedo boats, German, reported off St. Nazaire, 4, 9 ; sink M.L.306, 8 ; engaged by TYNEDALE and ATHERSTONE, 9.

Troops, British, embarked in M.Ls., 3 ; at St. Nazaire, 6 ; operations on shore, 7 ; 11.

TYNEDALE, H.M.S., escort for 10th A/S S.F., 2, 3 ; engages enemy submarine, 4 ; sinks French trawler, 4 ; action with German torpedo boats, 8 ; return to Plymouth, 10, 11 ; Appendices A and C.

Weather, 4, 5, 8, 9, 11.

Zeebrugge, raid in 1918, comparison, 1 (and note).

Zone time (B.S.T.), 3 (note).

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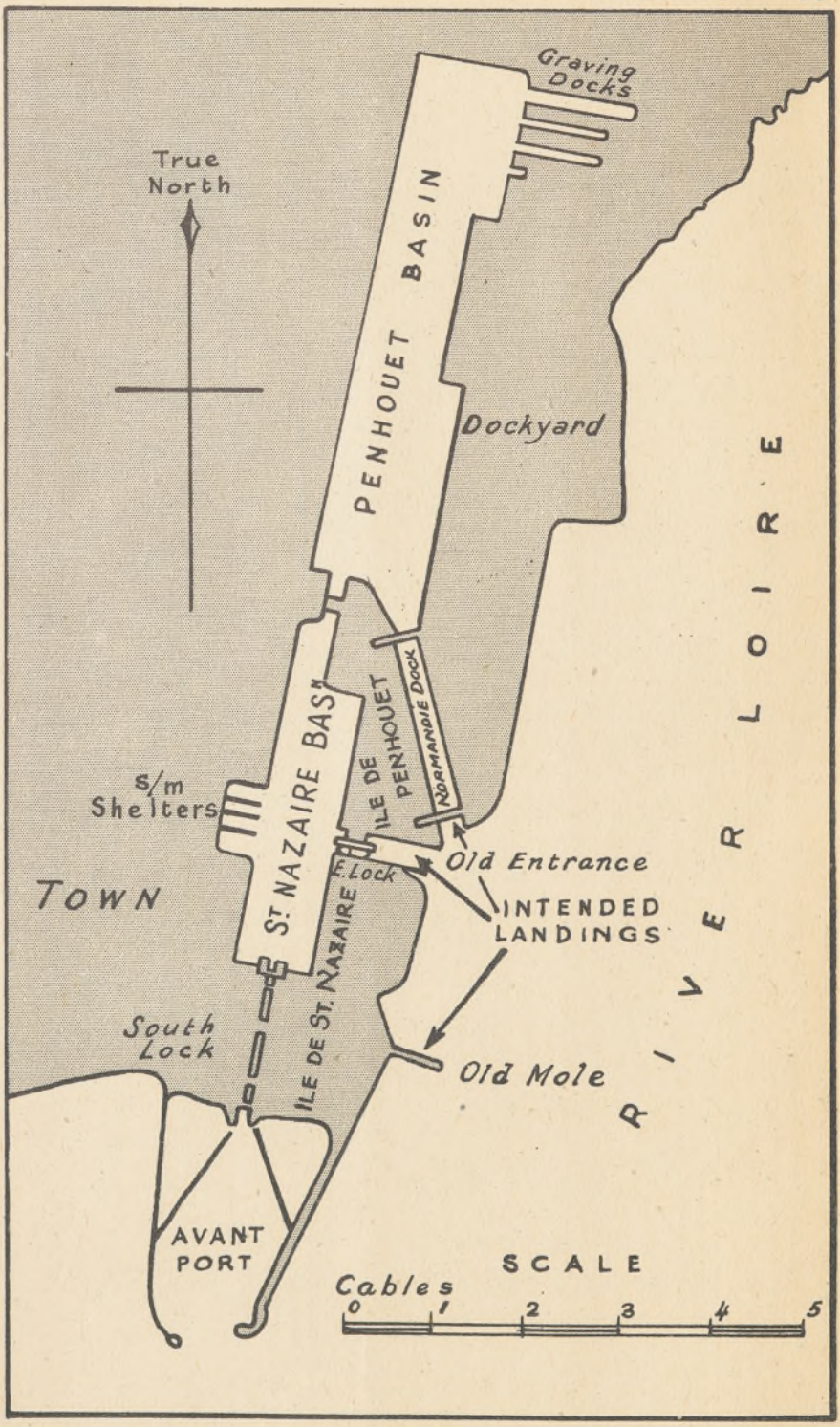
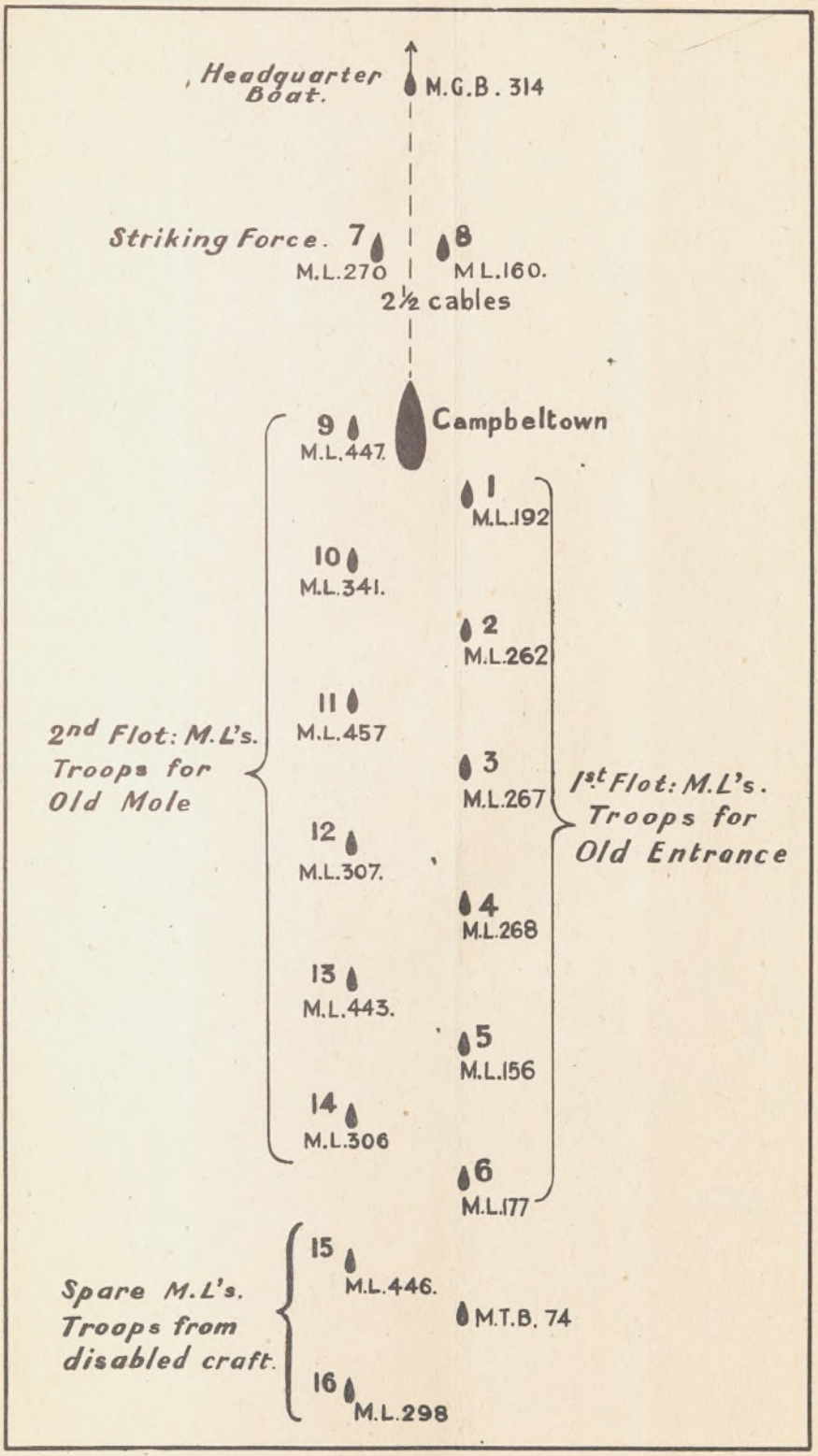
PLAN 1.



ST NAZAIRE

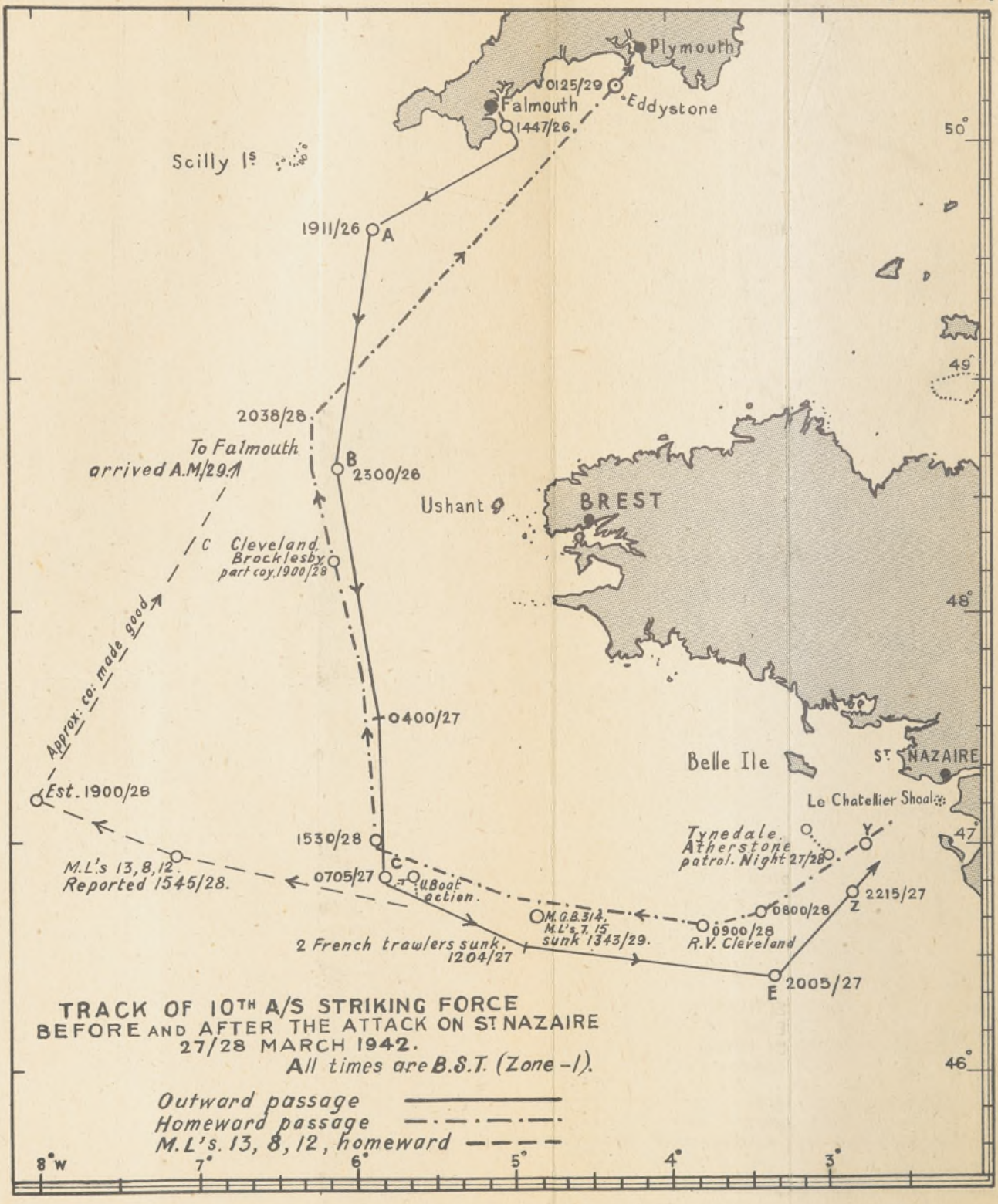
PLAN 2.



CRUISING ORDER FOR APPROACH

Distance between columns and ships in column — 1 cable

PLAN 3.



TRACK OF 10TH A/S STRIKING FORCE
BEFORE AND AFTER THE ATTACK ON St NAZAIRE
27/28 MARCH 1942.
All times are B.S.T. (Zone -1).

Outward passage ——————
Homeward passage —·—·—·—
M.L's. 13, 8, 12, homeward – – – –

PLAN 4.

ATTACK ON ST NAZAIRE
27/28 MARCH 1942

THE APPROACH.

SHEWING

POSITION OF FORCE WHEN FIRST FIRED ON.

APPROXIMATE POSITIONS OF ENEMY DEFENCES.

Reduction from Chart 2989

KEY

- .....Heavy A/A Batteries (3/4 guns).
- .....Light Flak Positions.
- .....Coastal Battery. (Low Angle). (3/4 guns).
- .....Searchlights.

Scale

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Cables.

ST NAZAIRE

Penhouet Basin

St Nazaire Basin

Lockgate

Old Entrance

Old Mole

Nazaire Shoal

Mindin Pt

GRANDE ROAD

MINDIN BANK

La Ville-ès-Martin

No 3

0125/28
Searchlight switched on.

M.G.B. 314

0129/28

M.L.7

M.L.8

M.L.9

Campbeltown

M.L.1

M.L.11

M.L.2

Les Morees Tower

M.L.12

M.L.3

M.L.13

M.L.4

M.L.14

M.L.5

M.L.15

M.L.6

M.L.16

M.T.B.74

BONNE BAY CHANNEL

47° 15' N

No 2

Eve Pt

Charpentier (Deep water) channel, 4-5 fathoms.

LES MOREES BANK

Track of Attacking Force.

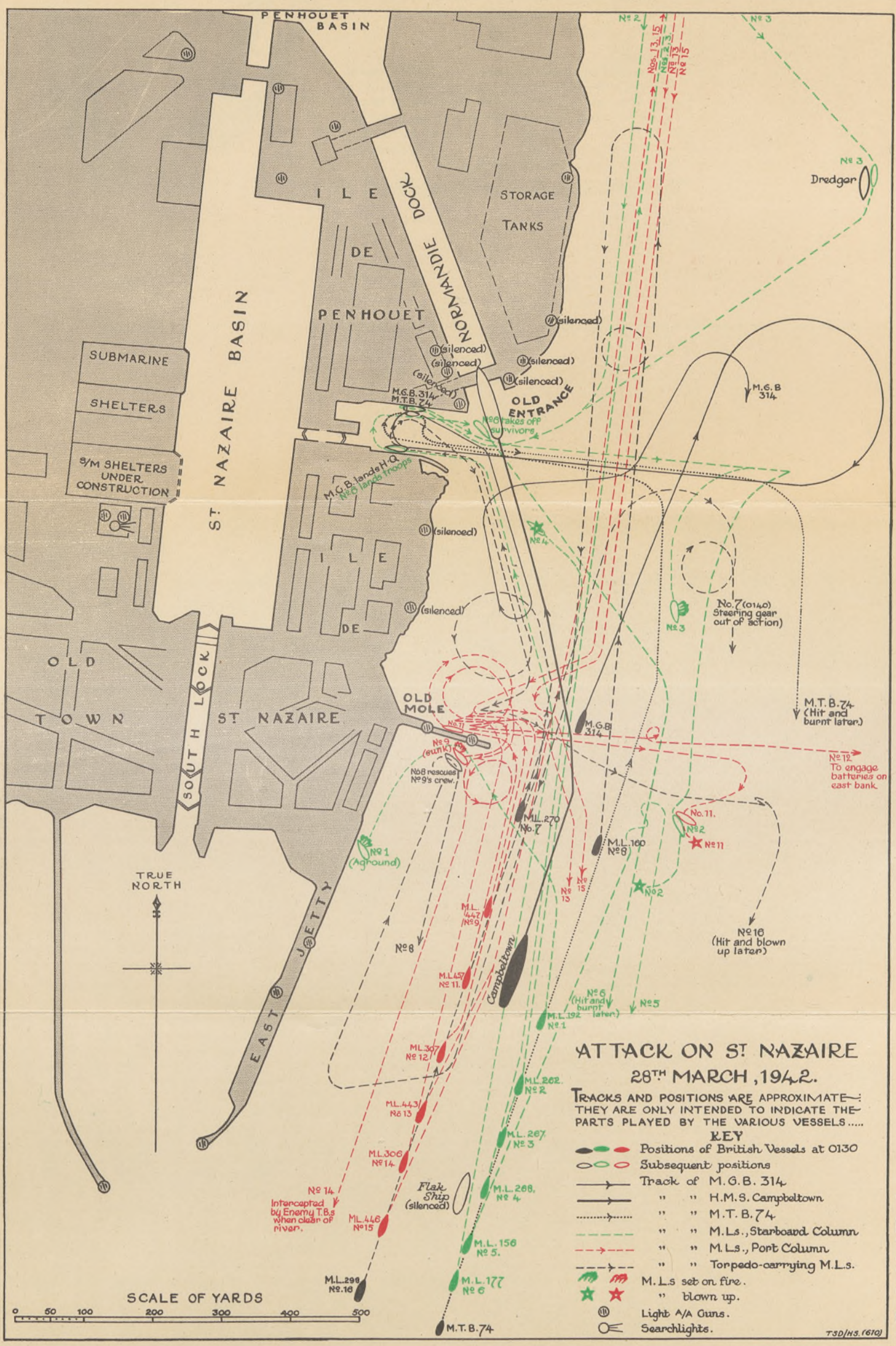
Depths ¼ to 2 fathoms at low water

Depths 2½ to 3 fathoms

No 4.

LE POINTEAU BANK

2° 16' W



ATTACK ON ST NAZAIRE
28TH MARCH, 1942.

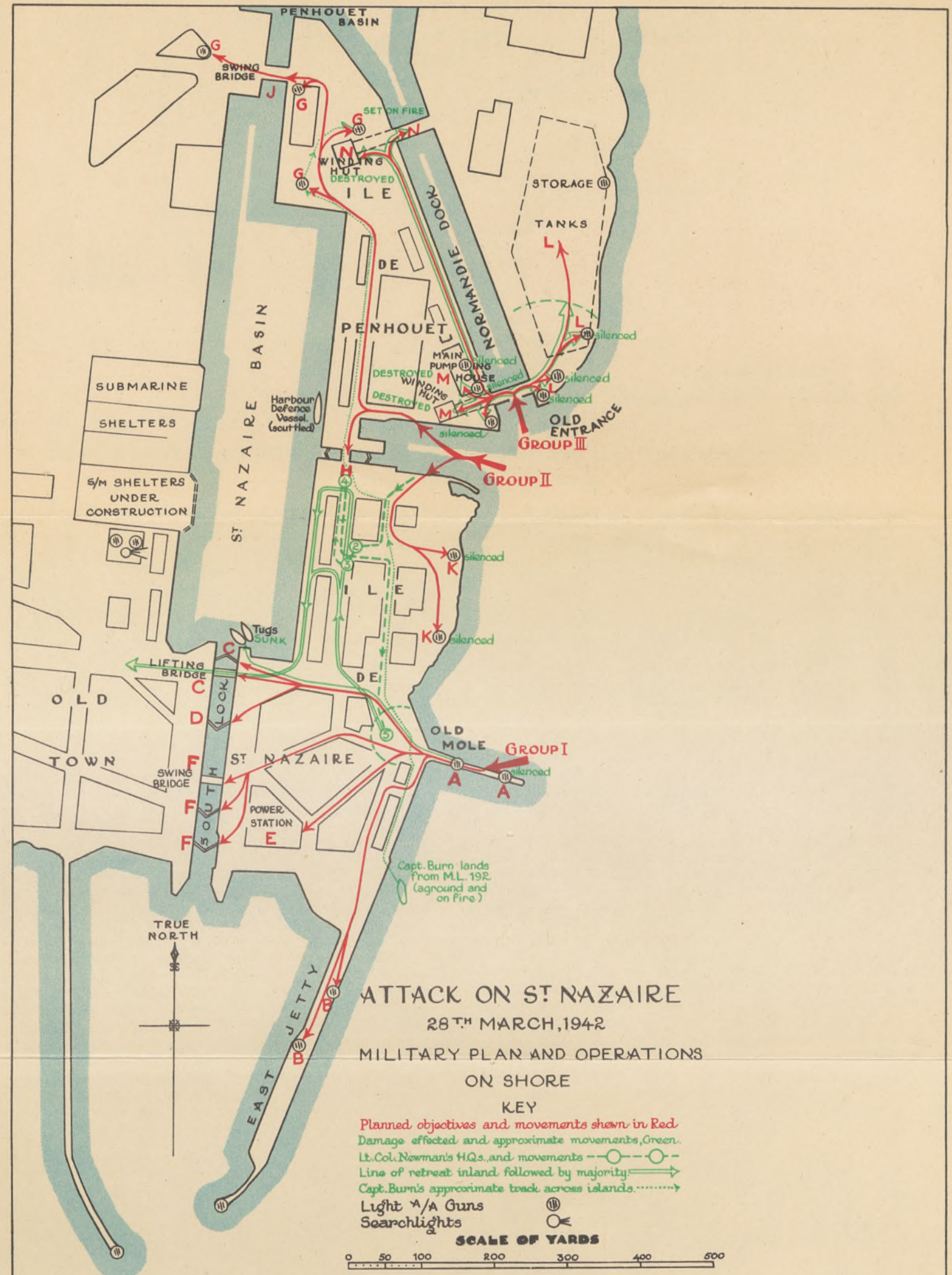
TRACKS AND POSITIONS ARE APPROXIMATE: THEY ARE ONLY INTENDED TO INDICATE THE PARTS PLAYED BY THE VARIOUS VESSELS.....

KEY

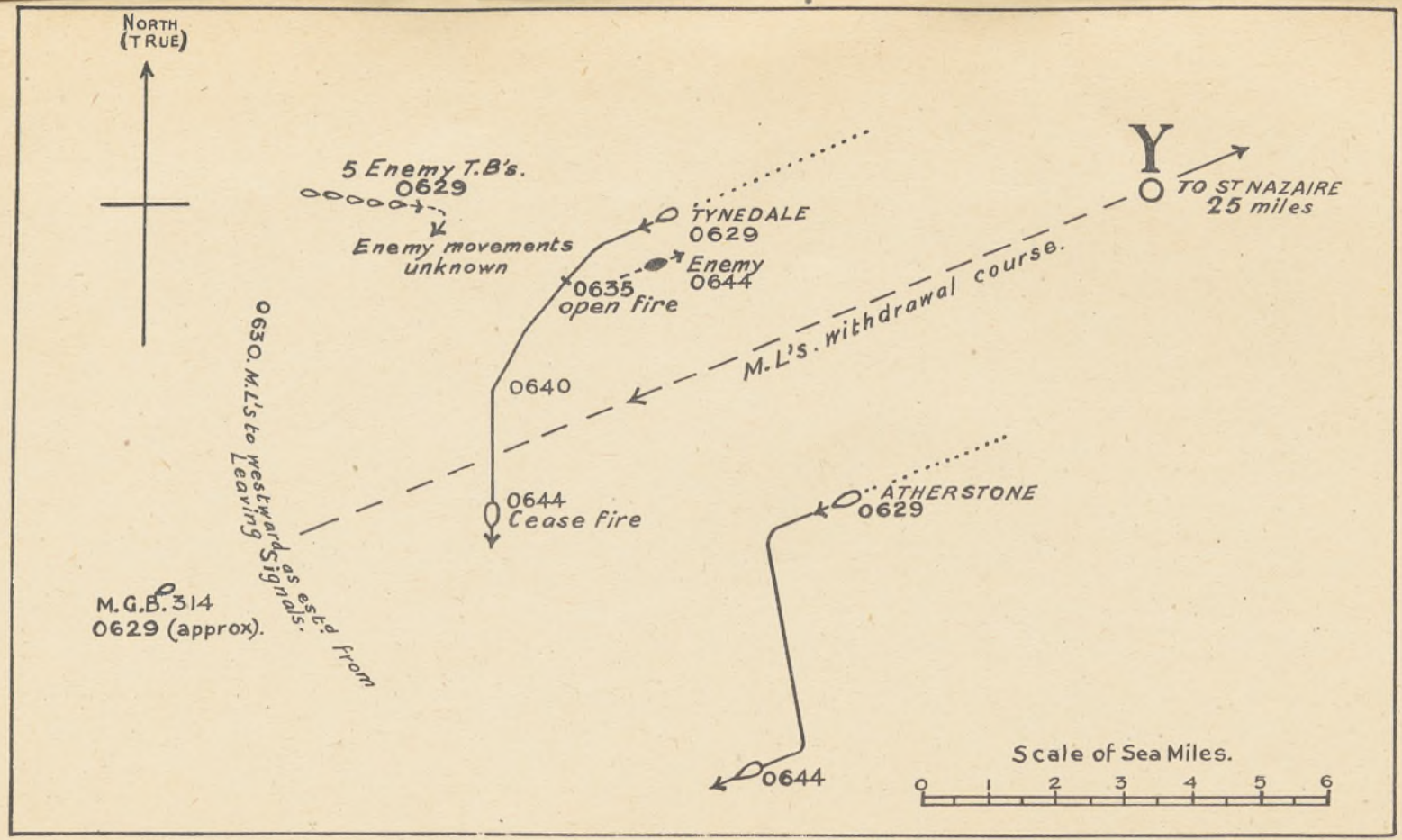
- Positions of British Vessels at 0130
- Subsequent positions
- Track of M.G.B. 314
- " " H.M.S. Campbeltown
- " " M.T.B. 74
- " " M.Ls., Starboard Column
- " " M.Ls., Port Column
- " " Torpedo-carrying M.Ls.
- M.Ls set on fire.
- " blown up.
- Light A/A Guns.
- Searchlights.

T.S.D/H.S.(670)

PLAN 5.


PENHOUET BASIN
SWING BRIDGE
SET ON FIRE
WINDING HUT DESTROYED
ILE DE PENHOUET
NORMANDIE DOCK
STORAGE TANKS
MAIN PUMPING HOUSE
silenced
DESTROYED
OLD ENTRANCE
GROUP III
GROUP II
ST NAZAIRE BASIN
SUBMARINE SHELTERS
S/M SHELTERS UNDER CONSTRUCTION
Harbour Defence Vessel. (scuttled)
Tugs SUNK
LIFTING BRIDGE
LOCK
OLD TOWN
SWING BRIDGE
ST NAZAIRE
SOUTH
POWER STATION
OLD MOLE
GROUP I
Capt. Burn lands from M.L. 192 (aground and on fire.)
EAST JETTY
TRUE NORTH
ATTACK ON ST NAZAIRE
28TH MARCH, 1942
MILITARY PLAN AND OPERATIONS ON SHORE
KEY
Planned objectives and movements shewn in Red
Damage effected and approximate movements, Green.
Lt.Col. Newman's H.Q.s. and movements
Line of retreat inland followed by majority
Capt. Burn's approximate track across islands
Light A/A Guns
Searchlights
SCALE OF YARDS
0 50 100 200 300 400 500

PLAN 6.



PLAN 7.

ACTION BETWEEN H.M. SHIPS TYNEDALE AND ATHERSTONE AND 5 GERMAN TORPEDO BOATS
0630 28 MARCH 1942

N.B. No track chart of this action is available: movements shown are conjectural only